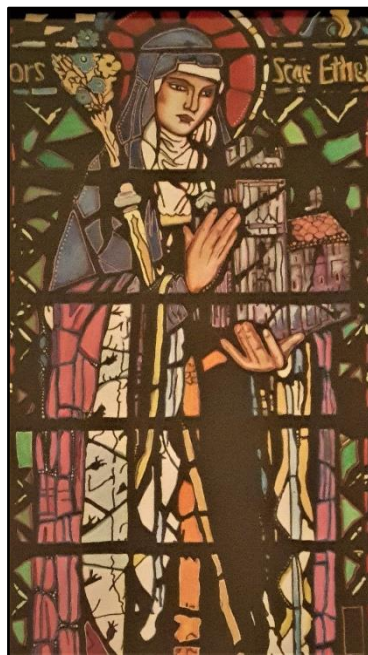


**THE STORY OF AN ENGLISH SAINT'S CULT:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF  
ST ÆTHELTHRYTH OF ELY, c.670 – c.1540**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis charts the history of the cult of St Æthelthryth of Ely, arguing that its longevity and geographical extent were determined by the malleability of her character, as narrated within the hagiographical texts of her life, and the continued promotion of her shrine by parties interested in utilising her saintly power to achieve their goals. Arranged chronologically and divided into five distinct periods, the thesis demonstrates that this symbiotic relationship was key in maintaining and elongating the life of the cult. Employing digital humanities tools to analyse textual, archaeological, material, cartographic, and documentary sources covering the cult's eight-hundred-year history, the study charts its development firstly within East Anglia, and subsequently across the whole country, and internationally. Several spheres of the saint's influence are defined, revealing a number of potential short- and long-distance pilgrimage routes focussed on locations with links to Æthelthryth's shrine. This study's longitudinal approach also highlights a more general shift in the co-ordination of venerative practice away from the ecclesiastical centres and towards the parishes and the laity in the fifteenth century before summarising the overall impact of her cult, which was only curtailed by the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the sixteenth century.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

According to Douglas Adams and John Lloyd in the Meaning of Liff, an Ely is ‘the first, tiniest inkling that something, somewhere has gone terribly wrong’. Luckily for me, choosing to research the cult of Ely’s saint, Æthelthryth, has proved not to be the Ely as defined by Adams and Lloyd. Instead, it was the start of a four-year journey that has revealed a saint with such a depth of character, such an extent of geographical influence, and such a variety of descriptions and depictions of her, that studying her has consistently filled me more with a sense of anticipation than foreboding. Obviously, a project of this nature cannot be undertaken in isolation, and there are a number of people without whose help my excitement could quite easily have turned to trepidation, and who therefore deserve not only an acknowledgement here, but a far larger debt of gratitude.

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Outside of the academia bubble, I must mention my parents Kathleen and David, whose support has always been unwavering, even if their understanding of why I'm doing what I'm doing has sometimes been a cause more for bemusement than anything else! Thanks also to John and Janev Stark and Kokbun Lee – PopeCons should definitely be a thing – and to those of you who were always by my side and in my thoughts, especially at the beginning of this journey. You know who you are and your faith in me and my decisions will never be forgotten. Finally, Anna, I cannot put into words how much your help, support, time, unflinching confidence, and uncomplaining acceptance of the other woman (albeit a long-dead one) in our relationship means and has meant to me. When I entered your life, Audrey came too, and the fact that you have welcomed her into it, even to the extent of having her pictures on the wall, means the world to me. Thank you.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

(Full biographic details of literary abbreviations are contained both in the thesis itself and in the Bibliography)

<i>Ælfric</i>	<i>Ælfric's Life of Saints</i> (Skeat)
CCCC MS 393	Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 393
GIS	Geographic information System
<i>Goscelin</i>	<i>Goscelin, Miracula Sancte Ætheldretha Virginis</i> (Love)
<i>HE</i>	<i>Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum</i>
<i>LE</i>	<i>Liber Eliensis</i>
<i>LE(B)</i>	<i>Liber Eliensis</i> (Blake)
<i>LE(F)</i>	<i>Liber Eliensis</i> (Fairweather)
<i>Libellus</i>	<i>Libellus quorundam insignium operum beati Æthelwoldi</i> or <i>Libellus Æthelwoldi</i>
<i>VCH</i>	Victoria County History
<i>Vie</i>	The life of Saint Audrey (McCash and Barban)
<i>Wilton (C)</i>	The Wilton Chronicle (Dockray-Miller)
<i>Wilton (L)</i>	The Wilton Life (Dockray-Miller)

## **LIST OF ALTERNATIVE NAMES AND SPELLINGS**

(The spelling of personal names is consistent within this thesis. However, some texts refer to a variety of alternative names and spellings and these are listed here for reference)

Ana	Anna
Æthelburh	Ethelburga
Æthelthryth	Aethildrudis, Audrey, Audrée, Etheldreda
Ecgfrith	Ecgfrid
Eorconberht	Erconbert
Eorcongota	Erkengota
Seaxburh	Sexburga

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Objectives and Methodological Approach of the Study**

Every year on the 23 June a ceremony takes place in a church in the heart of London. A small reliquary is retrieved from the drawer in which it is kept and is processed around the interior of the church, accompanied by the burning of incense and the singing of songs. After the service is over, the reliquary is placed back in the drawer where it stays until the same date twelve months later. The church is the Roman Catholic parish church of St Etheldreda at Ely Place in Holborn, the reliquary is said to contain a fragment of bone taken from the palm of the hand of the saint to whom the church is dedicated, and the date is the anniversary of the saint's death in 679. The ceremony that takes place on her feast day is a vestigial reminder of the veneration that would have occurred at the shrine that contained her relics, and that stood in the centre of the abbey and cathedral of Ely for nearly nine hundred years until it was destroyed in the mid-sixteenth century during the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Throughout the Middle Ages the shrine at Ely of Etheldreda, or Æthelthryth, to use her original Anglo-Saxon name, was the focal point of the saint's cult and the destination for pilgrims who would have visited it seeking cures, redemption, or forgiveness. The cult at Ely was established by Æthelthryth's sister and successor as abbess, Seaxburh, sixteen years after Æthelthryth's death. An account written by Bede in the early eighth century tells us that her coffin was opened in 695 with the intention of moving her remains to a larger stone tomb that was to be placed in a more prominent position in the abbey.<sup>1</sup> Her body was found to be intact and a tumour on her neck that was the likely cause of death was found to have healed *post mortem*,

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<sup>1</sup> Bertram Colgrave and R A B Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), Book IV, ch. 19, pp. 394-395.

leaving only a scar behind. Miracles were witnessed at the tomb, and from that time on and throughout the Middle Ages it was the subject of veneration and a place of pilgrimage. The popularity of her shrine was such that, by its peak at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the total value of offerings to St Æthelthryth had reached almost £95 per annum, far greater than that of many of the other major shrine centres of the time.<sup>2</sup>

However, over the course of the nine-hundred-year history of its saint's cult, the community at Ely had been constantly responding to events that affected or threatened it, of which there were a significant number. In the ninth century the abbey was subjected to a series of destructive raids by the Vikings, while in the tenth it was refounded as a Benedictine house and its secular priests replaced with monks. The abbey was on the side of the rebels opposed to William the Conqueror and was the site of their stronghold during of the Siege of Ely in 1070. It was eventually taken under Norman control and was declared a bishopric in its own right in 1109, but only after a lengthy dispute with the diocese of Lincoln. Throughout the Middle Ages the Ely community was the target of numerous legal challenges over the abbey's landholdings while it also strived to maintain and enhance its position as a powerful ecclesiastical force in East Anglia, in competition with other local foundations such as Bury St Edmunds, Peterborough, Ramsey, and Norwich. Any of these events could have jeopardised the future of Ely and the continuation of its cult, but the common defence relied upon by the Ely monks was their saint, Æthelthryth, and to this end they employed her character many times and in numerous different guises.

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from the Ely sacrist's rolls, reproduced in Ben Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2001), Table 3, p. 216. In comparison, Norwich's rolls show income for the same time of around £78 (noted as being received at the High Altar; the income received specifically at the shrine of St William was 66 shillings), Lincoln's was approximately £22, and Durham's was £28, *ibid.*, Tables 5, 7, and 8, pp. 218, 223, and 226. The only shrine for which sacrist's rolls exist that show income greater than Ely's at this time is that of St Thomas at Canterbury, with receipts of £255 per annum, see *ibid.*, Table 2, p. 215.

The saint was clearly the epicentre of the cult's activity, and this thesis provides an examination of the figure of St Æthelthryth and explores the influence she was believed to have exerted which enabled her cult at Ely to become one of the longest-lived of the Middle Ages. A cult's influence is defined here in terms of its regional, national, and international reach, its duration, and its effectiveness, and in order to understand these elements this thesis addresses three specific questions: What was the geographical extent of the saint's cult across its lifetime, what factors contributed to its longevity, and what was its impact? In answering these questions, the thesis also discusses what inferences and conclusions can be drawn from the study of the cult of Æthelthryth that are applicable to the wider study of the cult of saints. Alongside these research objectives, a further aim was to explore how tools from the field of digital humanities could be utilised with the available sources to better store, evaluate, and present the information they contain.

Since cults were not static entities but evolved and adapted to take account of changes in religious practice or to react to circumstances that affected their communities, choosing to analyse just a specific period of the cult's history would not have provided a full picture of how the influence of its saint developed and changed across its lifetime. The approach taken here, therefore, has been to conduct a longitudinal study of the cult from its inception through to its dissolution. This type of approach has been applied to the studies of a number of other Anglo-Saxon saints,<sup>3</sup> and this thesis has utilised the methodological benefits of each and combined them with the organisational, analytical, and illustrative power of a geographic information

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<sup>3</sup> David Rollason's monograph on St Mildrith of Thanet was one of the earliest, see David W Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester, 1982), and it has been followed by studies of St Oswald of Northumbria, St John of Beverley, St Edmund, and St Wilfrid, see Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge, eds., *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, 1995); Susan E Wilson, *The Life and After-Life of St John of Beverley: The Evolution of the Cult of an Anglo-Saxon Saint* (Aldershot, 2006); Anthony Bale, ed., *St Edmund, King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint* (York, 2009); and Nicholas J Higham, ed., *Wilfrid: Abbot, Bishop, Saint. Papers from the 1300th Anniversary Conferences* (Donington, Lincolnshire, 2013). These studies are discussed in more detail in the review of scholarship and historiography.

system (GIS). A range of sources has been employed in order to fully appreciate and define the extent of the saint's influence. These sources include not only the hagiographical texts relating to Æthelthryth's life and miracles, but also incorporate archaeological evidence, material culture and dedications from parish churches, records of ecclesiastical calendars and litanies, relic lists, charters, wills, and medieval cartography. The interdisciplinary approach applied to this research has resulted in the identification of links and interactions between the sources which would otherwise not have been recognised. Consequently, the resulting holistic view of Æthelthryth's cult has enabled previously unknown patterns of activity and religious practice to become evident, and these have been brought to life through a visual interpretation provided by a series of maps, the production of which has been made possible through the use of the GIS.

Æthelthryth has been variously described as a local, regional, or national saint.<sup>4</sup> However, this research has revealed that the cult of Æthelthryth was not just centred on Ely and East Anglia, but it has also provided evidence of a discrete area of venerative activity in the southwest of England, links to such disparate locations as the Welsh Marches and the Humber Estuary, and indications that her story was being disseminated as far afield as Francia and Scandinavia.

While she could therefore have been labelled as a local, regional, national, or even international saint dependent upon the circumstances and the period being described, these categorisations are both irrelevant and misleading. They project the image of a static cult, the boundaries of which were defined and did not subsequently alter. In reality, it is evident that Æthelthryth's cult was dynamic and constantly changing in nature, and it is better defined as having had a number of spheres of influence that became established and evolved at different periods during its lifetime. These spheres of influence of St Æthelthryth had lifecycles of their own, and it is

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<sup>4</sup> Alan Thacker uses the example of Æthelthryth to demonstrate the characteristics of a local saint, see Alan Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint', in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe, eds., *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 59-60, while Virginia Blanton describes her as 'a regional saint [that] was received as a national saint', Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2007), p. 11.

only through the evaluation of them here, both separately and as a whole, that the extent of the saint's influence has been able to be identified.

Any one from the catalogue of momentous events that befell Ely throughout the Middle Ages and that are outlined above could have caused the future success of the foundation to be in doubt, but the one constant upon which Ely's monastic community came to rely was their saint, Æthelthryth. An examination within this thesis of the textual descriptions and images of her from the nine centuries that her cult was active show that she was cast variously in the role of royal queen and princess, pious virgin, benevolent teacher and abbess, generous patron, steadfast protector, merciless and vengeful punisher, and nationalistic icon. Each of these guises of Æthelthryth was employed either as a direct response to events that affected the community at Ely, for example as a defence against the legal challenges it faced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, or as an exemplar through which certain behaviours could be demonstrated, for instance as a role model for the monks installed there during the Benedictine Reforms of the late tenth century. It is argued in this thesis that the principal reason behind the longevity of Æthelthryth's cult was the flexibility of her character, which was adapted by the authors who wrote her story and the artists who depicted her to suit the message they were attempting to convey. This was by no means a one-sided arrangement, however. While the portrayals of Æthelthryth were intentionally crafted to help fulfil the ambitions of those commissioning them, the rewriting and updating of her hagiography and imagery resulted in the continued promotion of her cult, thus helping to secure its survival during times of upheaval and turbulence. Evidence of this mutually advantageous relationship can be seen repeatedly throughout the lifetime of the cult, from Bede's portrayal of her in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (henceforth in this thesis referred to as *HE*) as a role model to the Northumbrian church,<sup>5</sup> through to the sixteenth-century images that can be found in Norfolk's

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<sup>5</sup> See *HE*, Book IV, chs. 19 and 20, pp. 390-401.

parish churches, commissioned and paid for from the bequests of wealthy lay patrons. The evolution of the cult of Æthelthryth across its nearly nine-hundred-year history is charted within this thesis through the descriptions of the various refinements of her character and an evaluation of the objectives of those who employed them. As a result, it demonstrates that the cult's longevity was due substantially to the symbiotic relationship that existed between the saint and those who utilised and exploited the perception of her power and influence.

The longitudinal nature of this study has revealed shifts in the focal point and the pattern of veneration of Æthelthryth's cult throughout its life which can potentially be applied to the development of saints' cults more generally in England during the Middle Ages. At the time of the cult's establishment and during periods of upheaval or threat to the community at Ely, Æthelthryth was portrayed much more as a vengeful or protective figure and correspondingly much less as a benevolent one. Similarly, venerative activity tended to be mostly focussed on the shrine itself. In the period leading up to the abbey's refounding as a Benedictine institution in the late tenth century and as part of the strategy to increase its power and influence in East Anglia, land that had been accumulated for the foundation was held specifically under the custodianship of the saint herself, thus identifying her as its guardian and protector. Against both the Viking threat of the ninth century and the Norman threat of the eleventh, Æthelthryth was portrayed as the defender, violent if necessary, of Ely, with anyone who attempted to interfere with her shrine or threaten the lives of the monastery's residents being subjected to severe retribution and punishment. The narratives that describe these periods focus primarily on Æthelthryth's shrine, and in particular its inviolability and its resistance against anything that might jeopardise this. In contrast, during times when the foundation was more prosperous and its position more secure, Æthelthryth's character is portrayed in a much more benevolent light. An analysis of the miracle collections of Æthelthryth reveals that the descriptions of the punishments that had been meted out by the saint to Ely's adversaries were replaced by accounts of the cures that she had administered to and the intercessions she had made on



behalf of visitors to her shrine. At the same time, the stories' geographical focus shifted from a very much inward-looking, Ely-centric one to incorporate locations further afield both regionally and nationally, reflecting the foundation's increased success and its saint's expanding influence and popularity. This type of geographical and temporal study when applied to the miracle collections of other medieval saints could reveal patterns of influence and insights into their communities' responses to external events in much the same way as have been demonstrated here.

Up until the middle of the fourteenth century, venerative activity relating to Æthelthryth was almost exclusively concentrated in and controlled by the abbeys and cathedrals that held (or claimed to hold) her relics, that produced the texts telling the story of her life and miracles, and that chose to celebrate her feast days. The Winchester scriptorium of the Benedictine bishop Æthelwold commissioned hagiographies of Æthelthryth and produced ecclesiastical calendars commemorating the dates of her death and translation of her relics which were disseminated through the newly reformed foundations of the south and east of England in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. In the twelfth century, the perceived power of Æthelthryth's relics was harnessed by the Norman bishops as the central pillar of their strategy to break from the diocese of Lincoln and establish the bishopric of Ely. They combined the production of hagiographic narrative with the building of a new cathedral and the third translation of the saint's relics to paint a picture of a powerful and influential institution that believed it was fully deserving of its claim for ecclesiastical authority within East Anglia. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw such prominent foundations as York, Glastonbury, Durham, and Salisbury all claiming to hold relics of Æthelthryth, the presence of which they would have promoted as a way of attracting pilgrims to visit their cathedrals. Once there, the penitents

would have been shepherded on a predetermined route around the building's shrines and chapels that had been planned to maximise their spiritual experience.<sup>6</sup>

The *longue durée* approach applied to the study of Æthelthryth's cult in this thesis has brought to light that the level of control the ecclesiastical authorities had exercised over the veneration of her shrine for seven centuries was being eroded, and that the decisions as to how and where to celebrate and revere her were increasingly being made by the local parishes and the laity. Images of the saint began to appear on the walls, in the stained-glass windows, and on the furniture of parish churches, as parishioners took over financial responsibility for the nave of their church and thus were able to dictate how it was maintained and decorated. A geographical evaluation of the distribution of these images has revealed evidence of a network of potential pilgrimage routes across Norfolk that converged on the shrine at Ely. It is argued here that pilgrims journeying to her relics would have made interim stops at parish churches with links to Æthelthryth as a precursor to their arrival at the shrine itself. Viewing images of the saint and hearing stories of her life and miracles during the journey to Ely would have been a way of building up the anticipation of reaching the shrine, and it is likely that this practice would have been encouraged, and indeed undertaken, by the churches' clergy and parishioners themselves. It is extremely unlikely that this shift in control away from the ecclesiastical elite was restricted just to the veneration of the cult of Æthelthryth, and therefore it can be argued that it is indicative of a more universal transition of power towards the local clergy and the laity

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<sup>6</sup> Much has been written regarding the pilgrimage experience and the co-ordination of visitors' activities by the monastic authorities while they were inside the cathedrals, see for instance Ben Nilson, 'The Medieval Experience at the Shrine', in J. Stopford, ed., *Pilgrimage Explored* (York, 1999), and Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England*, especially ch. 5, pp. 122-143; Sarah Hopper, *To Be A Pilgrim: The Medieval Pilgrimage Experience* (Stroud, 2002), ch. 10, pp. 120-134; and Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2013), ch. 8, pp. 250-276. As an example of the physical changes that were made to ecclesiastical buildings to cater for the growth in pilgrimage, John Crook has described the alterations made to Durham cathedral in order to make Cuthbert's shrine more accessible while also regulating the procession of pilgrims around it, see John Crook, 'The Architectural Setting of the Cult of St Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral (1093-1200)', in D. W. Rollason, M. Harvey and M. Prestwich, eds., *Anglo-Norman Durham: 1093-1193* (Woodbridge, 1998), especially pp. 247-248.

that took place from the second half of the fifteenth century, which was only curtailed at the time of the Reformation.

The geographical analysis of the Norfolk parish churches is one example of how the use of a GIS has led to patterns of religious practice being identified that would otherwise have remained hidden, or where their significance would not have been fully appreciated or demonstrated. At its most fundamental level, the building of a database of sources related to the cult of Æthelthryth, essential to the functioning of a GIS, has provided a structured, accessible, and flexible method of storing the variety of data contained within them. However, aside from the organisational benefits it provides, a GIS also enables historians to display their sources and the results of the interpretation of them cartographically, and to undertake spatial analysis on the data which can reveal hitherto unrecognised patterns of activity.<sup>7</sup> All three of these capabilities have been utilised in this study, and in doing so, some of the challenges that have been associated with the application of GIS to historical research have, at least in part, also been addressed. The sources relating to Æthelthryth have been evaluated in this thesis both individually and in conjunction with each other, with the power of the GIS becoming especially evident as the relationships between the disparate sets of data have been explored and interpreted. From a single source perspective, identifying and mapping the locations of Ely's landholdings in the two-hundred-year period between the ninth-century Viking raids and the Norman Conquest, taken from charter information, has revealed a distinct shift in the focus of acquisition. This change coincided with the death of King Edgar (reigned 959-975) and the successions of Edward the Martyr (reigned 975-978) and Æthelred II (reigned 978-1016). One of the problems associated with the application of GIS into the humanities that has yet to be fully

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Gregory and Paul Ell first recognised these three categories of benefits of a GIS to historians and other humanities scholars in 2007, see Ian N Gregory and Paul S Ell, *Historical GIS: Technologies, Methodologies and Scholarship* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 9-10.

resolved is its inability to adequately represent temporal data.<sup>8</sup> The production within this study of a series of maps showing the expansion of landholdings associated with Ely Abbey at key points during the period overcomes this issue, and in so doing it demonstrates that during Edgar's reign acquisition of land by Ely was restricted primarily to Cambridgeshire, Ely's home county. After his death, however, it is clear that this policy was reversed, and that the pattern of acquisition was heavily weighted to the other East Anglian counties. The hypothesis is that this shift in focus is an indication of a change in the abbey's outlook from an initial phase of expansion, capitalising on the success of the refounding of Ely as a Benedictine institution in 970, to one of subsequent regional consolidation. This pattern only became evident when the GIS was used to map Ely's land acquisitions over the period of the reigns of the three kings.

The power of using a GIS within historical research really becomes apparent, however, when it is used as an analytical tool upon the combination of all of the available sources. Amalgamating the locational data for the sources listed above for Æthelthryth revealed three further distinct loci of activity that could relate to medieval journeys to, from, or through sites with links to the saint. As well as the local pilgrimages across Norfolk which were highlighted by the parish church information, the addition of geographical data relating to archaeological features, hagiographical texts and miracle stories, relic lists, and ecclesiastical calendars and litanies revealed patterns of activity in South West England, north of Ely through Lincolnshire and into Northumbria, and southwards towards London. These three groups of features crystallised into evidence of potential routes once an overlay of medieval roads, taken from sources such as the fifteenth-century Gough Map and the itineraries of medieval kings, were added. In the southwest, activity was centred on Canonsleigh Abbey, an Augustinian abbey located on the border between Devon and Somerset which was the only medieval monastic institution in

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<sup>8</sup> The representation of time within a GIS is probably the most difficult issue confronted by digital historians, see for instance Ian N Gregory, 'Exploiting Time and Space: A Challenge for GIS in the Digital Humanities', in D. J. Bodenhamer, J. Corrigan and T. M. Harris, eds., *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2010).

England (aside from Ely) with a dedication to Æthelthryth. A potential pilgrimage route in this area incorporated the shrine centres of Glastonbury and Salisbury, both of which claimed to hold Æthelthryth's relics, and Exeter, Winchester, and Sherborne, all of which celebrated her feast day, along with a number of parish churches containing her image.

North of Ely, two very early parish church dedications to Æthelthryth combined with archaeological evidence and claims of relics at Lincoln and Durham provided tantalising evidence of a long-distance pilgrimage route that would have mirrored the journey purported to have been taken by Æthelthryth herself in 672 from Coldingham Abbey in Northumbria to Ely. In contrast, charter evidence combined with the locations of material culture revealed a route to the south that would not necessarily have been used by pilgrims, but instead by the ecclesiastical elite, and which linked Ely with the foundation's bishops' palaces at Hatfield in Hertfordshire and Ely Place in London. The combination of the variety of source data, the computational and visual capacity of the GIS, and the interdisciplinary methodology applied to their interpretation has thus revealed a number of potential routes. While their one common feature was their links with St Æthelthryth, each of them had differing characteristics and uses from the others, the nuances of which would not have become apparent without the application and analytical power of the GIS.

### **The Historiography and Scholarship Relating to Æthelthryth and Ely**

Considering the longevity of Æthelthryth's cult and the paucity of other Anglo-Saxon saints, especially female ones, whose reputation and popularity stretched beyond the area in the vicinity of their shrine, Æthelthryth is an under-studied and under-represented figure in modern scholarship. There is only one study that addresses her cult in its entirety, and that is Virginia

Blanton's 2007 work *Signs of Devotion*.<sup>9</sup> Blanton's study covers the nine-hundred-year lifespan of Æthelthryth's cult and uses a chronological lens through which to analyse it. In her introduction Blanton states that the hagiographies of Æthelthryth are the core focus for her exploration of the saint's cult,<sup>10</sup> and this assertion is reinforced by her choice of titles for the five chapters, each of which specifically references a text or group of texts that were written during the period being discussed. While she does acknowledge the importance of material culture and parish church images of the saint in defining Æthelthryth's relationship with the laity in the later Middle Ages – for instance in Chapter Five she includes a very detailed analysis of the rood-screen at Ranworth in Norfolk,<sup>11</sup> and as an appendix she comprehensively lists images of the saint categorised by their medium, a number of which have been updated within this thesis<sup>12</sup> – only a few of the source types listed by Blanton are actually used to add to the arguments she makes in the main body of the book. By omitting some of these sources from her discussions and introducing those she does include as secondary in importance to the textual ones, their significance in understanding the impact of Æthelthryth's influence in major periods of Ely's history such as the Benedictine Reforms in the tenth century and the creation of the bishopric in the twelfth is lessened. By contrast, within this thesis the non-textual sources have been treated as having an equally fundamental role to play as the textual ones in defining Æthelthryth's influence throughout the history of her cult. This approach has provided evidence of the abbey's long-term strategy to break away from the diocese of Lincoln in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, has revealed a shift in control of venerative practice away from the ecclesiastical institutions and to the parishes and the laity in the fourteenth and fifteenth

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> She states that her discussions are centred on the production and reception of the various *Lives* of Æthelthryth, see *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 276-287.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 295-306.

centuries, and has enabled the discovery of the potential medieval pilgrimage routes described above.

Blanton rightly explores the cult of Æthelthryth from a gender perspective, suggesting that the multifarious portrayals of the saint's character are evidence of the suitability of her example to both male and female audiences.<sup>13</sup> This is a theme that she has explored in more depth in a number of articles published both prior to and after her book. Articles from 2002 and 2006 examine the shrine of Æthelthryth as a symbol of both bodily inviolability and of monastic isolation,<sup>14</sup> while in 2008 Blanton investigates the role of the other saintly women of Ely, Æthelthryth's sisters and nieces, identifying them as examples (possibly fabricated) through which the ecclesiastical ambitions of the Ely monks were achieved.<sup>15</sup> The basic hypothesis that Blanton is expounding in both her book and her articles, i.e. that the textual portrayals of Æthelthryth were a way of communicating with a diverse set of audiences, is wholly reinforced by the evidence presented within this thesis. However, what Blanton does not acknowledge, and which is fundamental to understanding the reasons for the longevity of Æthelthryth's cult, is the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the saint and those who were using her character for their own ends. The geographical and temporal spread of the source data relating to Æthelthryth presented in this thesis suggests that the diversity of her portrayal was itself responsible for the widespread promotion, and sometimes even the survival, of her cult. Bede's inclusion of the saint's story in the *HE*, for example, written for the consumption of the eighth-century Northumbrian church, probably prevented Æthelthryth's cult from dying out at the time

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 289. She describes the body of Æthelthryth as 'at times ... presented as distinctly feminized, and at other times it is masculinized'.

<sup>14</sup> See Virginia Blanton-Whetsell, '*Tota Integra, Tota Incorrupta*: The Shrine of St. Æthelthryth as Symbol of Monastic Autonomy', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 32 (2002), and Virginia Blanton, 'Ely's St. Æthelthryth: The Shrine's Enclosure of the Female Body as Symbol for the Inviolability of Monastic Space', in V. C. Raguin and S. Stanbury, eds., *Women's Space: Patronage, Place and Gender in the Medieval Church* (Albany, New York, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Virginia Blanton, 'Presenting the Sister Saints of Ely, or Using Kinship to Increase a Monastery's Status as a Cult Center', *Literature Compass*, 5 (2008).

of the Viking incursions. Similarly, Bishop Æthelwold's portrayal of her in texts written to facilitate the introduction of the Rule of St Benedict to Ely in the tenth century resulted in the transmission of accounts of her life and miracles into Benedictine foundations throughout the south and east of England. Æthelthryth's 'performative identity', as Blanton describes it,<sup>16</sup> helped fulfil the objectives of those who utilised it, but the success and longevity of her cult was reliant upon the widespread dissemination of their narratives and images.

The themes explored by Blanton build upon the work of a number of other scholars such as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, June Hall McCash, and Rosalind Love, all of whom have written extensively on the field of female monasticism, and who between them have produced translations and commentary on most of the major texts of Æthelthryth's life. Wogan-Browne's field of study is concentrated on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the period that encompasses the production of the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Vie Seinte Audrée* (henceforth referred to as the *Vie* in this thesis). Her earlier work explores the text's origins, identifying an East Anglian nun named Marie de France as the most likely author.<sup>17</sup> In subsequent articles, she examines the role of female patronage in medieval nunneries, using a version of the *Vie* that was linked to the nunnery at Campsey Ash in Suffolk as the basis for her work.<sup>18</sup> The study of female patronage within female monastic institutions was not new at this time, with writers such as Sharon Elkins and Sally Thompson in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrating that post-Conquest nunneries were being supported by wealthy female

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<sup>16</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 289.

<sup>17</sup> See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Rerouting the Dower: The Anglo-Norman Life of St Audrey by Marie (of Chatteris?)', in J. Carpenter and S.-B. MacLean, eds., *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women* (Chicago, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, '"Clerc u lai, muïne u dame": Women and Anglo-Norman Hagiography in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in C. M. Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge, 1996); Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150-1300* (Oxford, 2001); and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Powers of Record, Powers of Example: Hagiography and Women's History', in M. C. Erler and M. Kowaleski, eds., *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, New York, 2003). All three articles present broadly similar arguments in respect of the *Vie*.



donors,<sup>19</sup> but Wogan-Browne was able to show that these nunneries were using the examples of Anglo-Saxon saints such as Æthelthryth as a means of obtaining this patronage. The only translation of the *Vie* is that published in 2006 by June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban.<sup>20</sup> While there is little literary analysis of the text in this edition that develops the arguments around patronage further than those put forward by Wogan-Browne, the discussions surrounding the identity of the author of the *Vie* point to its likely origin as Chatteris Abbey, a foundation controlled by the abbey at Ely. The compelling arguments made by Wogan-Browne, McCash, and Barban surrounding the authorship of the *Vie* have been used within this thesis to evaluate the success of the two abbeys – Chatteris and Campsey Ash – in gaining patronage through the composition of a Life of Æthelthryth. Despite the contrasting states of the abbeys' financial circumstances prior to the acquisition of their respective manuscripts, there is evidence that both of their situations improved in the years following the *Vie*'s production. While it cannot be stated that the writing of a *Life* of Æthelthryth was solely responsible for the improvement in their fortunes, it is nevertheless an indication of the existence of a link between hagiography and patronage.

The third of the authors upon whose work Blanton based her examination of Æthelthryth's cult, Rosalind Love, produced in 2004 a translation of another of the hagiographical texts relating to Æthelthryth, the *Miracula Sancte Ætheldretha Virginis*.<sup>21</sup> This translation appears in the same volume as those of the hagiographies of three other female saints of Ely, all of whom were related to Æthelthryth. Æthelthryth's *miracula* is unusual in that no corresponding *vita* has been discovered, in contrast to Ely's other female saints for whom complete sets of hagiography

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<sup>19</sup> Sharon K Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1988); Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of the Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1991), especially pp. 161-210.

<sup>20</sup> June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban, eds., *The Life of Saint Audrey: A Text by Marie de France* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2006), [Henceforth *Vie*].

<sup>21</sup> Rosalind C Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely* (Oxford, 2004). [Love's translation of the *miracula* is henceforth referred to as *Goscelin*].

exist. Love includes a textual comparison within her introduction, concluding that the *miracula* and the three *vitae* are the work of an itinerant eleventh-century hagiographer, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin. She then goes on to make a compelling case for the existence of a lost or partially completed *vita* of Æthelthryth written by Goscelin to complement the *miracula*.<sup>22</sup> While Love's arguments make the case that there was a *vita* planned but never completed in the eleventh century, it is almost certain that one was produced less than half a century later, by a little-known monk of Ely named Gregory. A transcription of this verse *Life* was published in 1988 by Pauline Thompson and Elizabeth Stevens but contains little explanatory narrative for either the text itself or its author.<sup>23</sup>

It is argued within this thesis that the production of the Goscelin and Gregory texts formed part of a long-term strategy by Ely's monastic community to regain power and influence after the Norman Conquest, and to break away from the diocese of Lincoln to form their own bishopric. Their goal was ultimately achieved, and the see of Ely was created in 1109. Subsequent to this, as a means of legitimising the foundation's position historically, ecclesiastically, and legally, Hervey, bishop of Ely between 1109 and 1133, commissioned the production of what is probably the most important, and certainly the most reproduced, text in the foundation's history. The *Liber Eliensis*, completed during the second half of the twelfth century during the tenure of Hervey's successor, Bishop Nigel (in post 1133-1174), was part historical account, part hagiography, and part cartulary. While there has been little scholarly interest in the text itself to date, its significance in the wider context of the development of the Ely foundation and the influence of its saint during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are discussed fully in this thesis. The *Liber Eliensis* itself was transcribed authoritatively for the first time by Ernest Blake in 1962,<sup>24</sup> following on from his doctoral thesis of ten years earlier that traced its manuscript

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. xlviii-lviii.

<sup>23</sup> See Pauline A Thompson and Elizabeth Stevens, 'Gregory of Ely's Verse Life and Miracles of St Æthelthryth', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 106 (1988), pp. 333-390.

<sup>24</sup> E O Blake, ed., *Liber Eliensis* (London, 1962), [Henceforth *LE(B)*].

history.<sup>25</sup> While he does not comment to a great extent on its contents, his comprehensive documentation of its sources and the manuscript tradition that stemmed from its initial collation is unparalleled. From a codicological point of view, his analysis of the language and authorship of the manuscripts has laid the groundwork for future evaluation and exploration of the motivations behind its collation and its impact. The most recent such work is the full translation published by Janet Fairweather in 2005.<sup>26</sup> Fairweather's translation includes in its introduction comprehensive notes on the historical circumstances that faced Ely immediately prior to the *Liber's* collation and what she saw as the catalyst for its production, as well as compelling arguments surrounding the question of its authorship. Hereafter within this thesis, all Latin quotations from the *Liber* are taken from Blake's 1962 transcription (which has been abbreviated to *LE(B)* when referenced), with their English translations being taken from Fairweather's 2005 edition (abbreviated to *LE(F)*). If no specific edition is being referenced, then the abbreviation *LE* has been used.

Much of the remaining scholarship that has added to the academic knowledge of Æthelthryth, her cult, and the Ely foundation has addressed specific periods of time in Ely's history, and has mostly been limited to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The earliest of these, by Edward Miller, provides a very comprehensive history of the abbey at Ely augmented by detailed assessments of its landholdings, its legal, political, and royal documents, and its wealth, based on an exhaustive analysis of the extant historical texts and manuscripts.<sup>27</sup> While he omits any consideration of the impact of Ely's saint *per se*, his documentation of the land transactions that were undertaken in Æthelthryth's name have been used here to show how the influence of

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<sup>25</sup> E O Blake, 'Historia Eliensis, Book III' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Cambridge, 1952).

<sup>26</sup> Janet Fairweather, ed., *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth* (Woodbridge, 2005), [Henceforth *LE(F)*].

<sup>27</sup> Edward Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely: The Social History of an Ecclesiastical Estate from the Tenth Century to the Early Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1969).

Æthelthryth was central in the abbey's plan to increase its power and status through the acquisition of land in East Anglia in the tenth century.

The history of Ely and its abbey are also the subject of Susan Ridyard's book from 1988, Everett Crosby's from 1994, and Simon Keynes' and Dorothy Owen's chapters that are contained in Meadows and Ramsay's 2003 work *A History of Ely Cathedral*.<sup>28</sup> Ridyard and Crosby concentrate on the period either side of the Norman Conquest, with Ridyard suggesting that William I had used Æthelthryth's royal heritage as leverage with the Ely community prior to and during the rebellion of 1170. While this is true, this thesis demonstrates that both William's and Hereward's manipulation of Æthelthryth's character was much more complex than Ridyard argues, and that the saint's lineage was only one of the factors they used in pursuit of their aims during the siege. Crosby's book is a much more straightforward historical account of the period following the Norman Conquest. His narrative of the circumstances surrounding Ely's break from the Lincoln diocese and the subsequent creation of its own bishopric is, however, thorough and insightful. Both Keynes and Owen provide well-argued and factual overviews of the history of Ely, with Keynes covering the period from the death of Æthelthryth to the creation of the diocese of Ely, and Owen continuing the narrative from this point until the Reformation. Their accounts are contained in a much larger volume that charts the history of Ely and its abbey and cathedral right up to the end of the twentieth century and therefore they are necessarily occasionally light in detail, with the contribution of Ely's saint sometimes omitted in favour of the history of its abbots and bishops. Owen provides a very thorough account of the impact of the Reformation on the cathedral at Ely, and this would be a very good

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<sup>28</sup> Susan J Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988); Everett U Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter in Twelfth-Century England: A Study of the Mensa Episcopalis* (Cambridge, 1994); Simon Keynes, 'Ely Abbey 672-1109', in P. Meadows and N. Ramsay, eds., *A History of Ely Cathedral* (Woodbridge, 2003); Dorothy M Owen, 'Ely 1109-1539: Priory, Community and Town', in *ibid*.

starting point for any investigation into the fate of the relics of Æthelthryth after they were removed in 1541.

Methodologically, this thesis draws upon the small number of longitudinal studies of the cults of other Anglo-Saxon saints written over the last forty years. They all include comprehensive evaluations of the cults based on extant texts of the saints' lives and after-lives, recognising that the narratives are a reflection of or a response to the circumstances that affected the saints' institutions at the time. Together these studies demonstrate the progress that has been made in the study of the cult of saints, providing a deeper understanding of the motivations behind the hagiographies produced in the scriptoria of the Middle Ages. However, in general, the evidence that is presented and the conclusions reached could have been strengthened either by the inclusion of other, corroborative sources or the application of a fully multidisciplinary approach.

David Rollason's 1982 study of the cult of St Mildrith of Thanet (c.660-c.730), which is based upon his 1978 doctoral thesis of the same name,<sup>29</sup> and Susan Wilson's 2006 study of St John of Beverley (died 721)<sup>30</sup> are both constrained by the use of only hagiographical texts in their evaluation of their chosen saints' cults. Rollason identifies three distinct phases in the narratives relating to the genealogy of Mildrith, the first describing events from the late seventh and early eighth centuries, the second from one hundred years later, and the final one from after the Norman Conquest. He links the detail of the narratives to different stages in the history of the abbey at Minster-in-Thamet, primarily seeing them as a recounting of the abbey's response to the historic events that had affected it. Wilson considers each of the texts relating to John of Beverley in chronological order, beginning with Bede's account in the *HE* and finishing

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<sup>29</sup> David W Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Susan E Wilson, *The Life and After-Life of St John of Beverley: The Evolution of the Cult of an Anglo-Saxon Saint* (Aldershot, 2006).

with a sixteenth-century *vita* attributed to John Leland.<sup>31</sup> She uses these to gain an insight into his life as bishop of Hexham and to evaluate the miracles attributed to him after his death. The existence of a local cult in Brittany is explored through the written accounts of the transmission of John of Beverley's remains from England across the Channel, linking the activity there with the possible donation of his relics by King Athelstan (894-939).<sup>32</sup> Both of these studies limit themselves mainly to an evaluation of the hagiography, whereas a greater consideration of other non-textual sources could potentially have better defined the extent of the transmission of the Mildrith Legend and provided more evidence of the importance of John of Beverley's cult in Brittany.

Clare Stancliffe's and Eric Cambridge's edited volume from 1995 on the subject of St Oswald of Northumbria,<sup>33</sup> Anthony Bale's 2009 volume on St Edmund,<sup>34</sup> and Nicholas Higham's collection of 2013 that discusses the life of St Wilfrid<sup>35</sup> all bring together a number of essays that discuss the development of the saints' cults across the Middle Ages. Together these three collections of essays demonstrate the evolution of the study of the cults of Anglo-Saxon saints over the last twenty years. Contributors to the Oswald study include Alan Thacker, who discusses the spread of the cult during the seventh and eighth centuries,<sup>36</sup> with which there are evident parallels with the early growth of Æthelthryth's cult; Richard Bailey, who interprets the iconography of Oswald contained in later medieval material culture;<sup>37</sup> and Annemiek Jansen, whose essay on the spread of Oswald's cult into continental Europe also contains detail that resonates with elements of the introduction of Æthelthryth's story into Francia and Scandinavia.<sup>38</sup> The book

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<sup>31</sup> See her chapter entitled 'Sources', *ibid.*, pp. 5-19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125-131.

<sup>33</sup> Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge, eds., *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Bale, ed., *St Edmund, King and Martyr: Changing Images of a Medieval Saint* (York, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas J Higham, ed., *Wilfrid: Abbot, Bishop, Saint. Papers from the 1300th Anniversary Conferences* (Donington, Lincolnshire, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Alan Thacker, 'Membra Disjecta: The Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult', in C. Stancliffe and E. Cambridge, eds., *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Richard N Bailey, 'St Oswald's Heads', in *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Annemiek Jansen, 'The Development of the St Oswald Legends on the Continent', in *ibid.*

also includes a gazetteer of pre-Reformation church dedications to the saint compiled by Alison Binns.<sup>39</sup> Anthony Bale's volume on St Edmund extends the range of disciplines of the contributors and therefore the scope of the sources used to demonstrate what he describes as the 'rewritings, continuities and reconceptualisations of sanctity represented in Edmund's changing saintly image'.<sup>40</sup> One of Bale's specific objectives was to use multi- and interdisciplinary approaches, and as well as chapters on the hagiography,<sup>41</sup> he includes contributions relating to medieval music,<sup>42</sup> imagery in parish churches,<sup>43</sup> and an analysis of the miracle collections,<sup>44</sup> source types which, with the exception of religious music, are also explored in respect of the cult of Æthelthryth in this thesis. Bale has indeed incorporated a number of different disciplines within his study, but for a true interdisciplinary approach these sources needed to be evaluated holistically, something that is omitted both from this volume and that of Stancliffe and Cambridge. A concluding chapter by the editors that assesses the cults of Oswald and Edmund in the light of the findings of all of their contributors would have been a welcome addition.

By far the most comprehensive of the three edited collections is Nicholas Higham's study from 2013 on St Wilfrid.<sup>45</sup> With contributions from no fewer than twenty-three scholars and originating from two conferences held in 2009 to commemorate the 1300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wilfrid's death, Higham has produced an in-depth and wide-ranging evaluation of the life and cult of Wilfrid. The essays have been organised into five separate sections covering Wilfrid's

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<sup>39</sup> Alison Binns, 'Pre-Reformation Dedications to St Oswald in England and Scotland: A Gazetteer', in *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Bale, ed., *St Edmund*, p. vii.

<sup>41</sup> Carl Phelpstead, 'King, Martyr and Virgin: Imitatio Christi in Ælfric's Life of St Edmund', in *ibid.*; Anthony S G Edwards, 'John Lydgate's Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund: Politics, Hagiography and Literature', in *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Lisa Colton, 'Music and Identity in Medieval Bury St Edmunds', in *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Pinner, 'Medieval Images of St Edmund in Norfolk Churches', in *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Bale, 'St Edmund in Fifteenth-Century London: The Lydgatian Miracles of St Edmund', in *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas J Higham, ed., *Wilfrid: Abbot, Bishop, Saint. Papers from the 1300th Anniversary Conferences* (Donington, Lincolnshire, 2013).

career, his cultural legacy, the geographical reach of his cult outside Northumbria, pre- and post-Reformation historiography relating to Wilfrid, and ending with an evaluation by Catherine Cubitt of his life and its impact on the Anglo-Saxon church.<sup>46</sup> The hagiography of Wilfrid is explored to a degree not seen in the two earlier collections,<sup>47</sup> while the section entitled 'Wilfrid Beyond Northumbria' reveals new detail regarding Wilfrid's contacts with Frisians, Celts, and Mercians.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast to the two earlier volumes relating to Oswald and John of Beverley, Higham's study of Wilfrid includes essays which extract the common themes that link its papers together and which consider the impact of the bishop's life from a wider political perspective and over a longer period of time. For instance, Higham articulates Wilfrid's influence on the development of the early Northumbrian church by linking chapters covering ecclesiastical architecture, early religious music, stone monuments, and church dedications,<sup>49</sup> while Cubitt identifies the bishop's strategy to safeguard the positions of his existing foundations through a combination of legal and ecclesiastical power and continental alliances.<sup>50</sup> The absence from Stancliffe and Cambridge's and Bale's volumes of summarising or concluding chapters, and their preference of leaving the individual authors' conclusions to stand by themselves means that, while each is completely valid in its own right, any overarching themes that straddle several time periods or that cover more than one discipline may have been overlooked. The methodology utilised within this thesis, which is more aligned with that employed by Higham in his study of Wilfrid, ensures that longer-term interrelationships, such as those between the post-Conquest abbots

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<sup>46</sup> Catherine Cubitt, 'St Wilfrid: A Man for his Times', in *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> For instance, see Mark Laynesmith, 'Anti-Jewish Rhetoric in the Life of Wilfrid', in *ibid.*, where his analysis of the language of Stephen's *vita* of Wilfrid reveals an alternative understanding of the Jewish references it contains, and Christopher Grocock, 'Wilfrid, Benedict Biscop, and Bede – The Monk Who Knew Too Much?', in *ibid.*, in which Grocock re-examines Bede's relationship with Wilfrid using some of Bede's lesser-known works.

<sup>48</sup> See James T Palmer, 'Wilfrid and the Frisians', in *ibid.*; Thomas M Charles-Edwards, 'Wilfrid and the Celts', in *ibid.*, and Damian J Tyler, 'Bishop Wilfrid and the Mercians', in *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Nicholas J Higham, 'Preface', in *ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>50</sup> Catherine Cubitt, 'St Wilfrid: A Man for his Times', in *ibid.*, pp. 315-330.



and bishops of Ely that ultimately led to the creation of the bishopric of Ely, have been identified and their significance recognised.

The relationships and patterns that have been discovered and evaluated from the various sources used within the study of Æthelthryth's cult would not have been as distinguishable nor their significance as clearly illustrated were it not for the application of the GIS to the data identified from them. The use of GIS within the humanities, and specifically within historical research, is a relatively modern development, with historians exploring its application and beginning to recognise its benefits only in the last twenty years. As defined by two of the earliest proponents of using a GIS within the humanities, Ian Gregory and Paul Ell, the system is 'a spatial database technology concerned with structuring, integrating, visualising and analysing spatially referenced data'.<sup>51</sup>

The fundamental reliance of a GIS on spatial data – in other words the need for a set of geographical co-ordinates for each piece of information used by the GIS – has presented a number of challenges for the humanities that have been difficult to overcome, and these have been recognised by scholars for almost as long as have the benefits of its application. Anne Knowles, another of the earliest specialists in historical GIS and editor of the first volume to collate case studies of its use within historical research,<sup>52</sup> was also probably the first to articulate the problems associated with its introduction. She recognised the dichotomy between the technological dependence upon accurate, precise data and the often uncertain nature of historical sources, the limitations of a GIS to handle qualitative information (for instance within textual sources such as charters), and the problems involved with using a GIS for any kind of temporal analysis, as mentioned above.<sup>53</sup> Evidence that these are not just issues

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<sup>51</sup> Gregory and Ell, *Historical GIS*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>52</sup> Anne K Knowles, ed., *Past Time, Past Place: GIS for History* (Redlands, California, 2002). She includes studies on historical topics as diverse as the Salem Witch Trials of the seventeenth century, the causes of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, and the mapping of British population history.

<sup>53</sup> Anne K Knowles, 'Emerging Trends in Historical GIS', *Historical Geography*, 33 (2005), pp. 9-10.

affecting the earliest GIS historians and that they continue to be problematic is demonstrated by their continued discussion within academic scholarship.<sup>54</sup> The range of source types used within this thesis has meant that a considerable effort has been made to attach co-ordinates to each of the data items. The twelfth-century place names recorded in the charters contained in the *LE*, for example, are in many cases spelt differently from their modern-day counterparts, and in some cases the name has completely changed. Similarly, the recording of distance within the narratives is not uniform and may not necessarily be representative of the how far someone travelled, especially as the mode of transport is often not mentioned.<sup>55</sup>

The problems discussed above are heavily outweighed by the benefits of GIS to historical research, and, as has been demonstrated within this thesis, they can be overcome, albeit currently rather more labour intensively than would be desired. The true value of a historical GIS is in its ability to integrate spatial data from multiple sources, manipulate them, and then display them, revealing patterns that would otherwise have been far more difficult to spot.<sup>56</sup> One criticism of historic GIS has been that it is better at identifying patterns than explaining them,<sup>57</sup> although any interpretation of these patterns would obviously have not been possible, had they not been observed in the first place. Both GIS specialists who wish to see the tools used more widely within the humanities, and humanities scholars who want to explore new ways of interpreting and evaluating historical data have recognised the potential for the application of GIS into historical research, but as yet, the volume of scholarship produced that

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<sup>54</sup> See for instance Gregory and Ell, *Historical GIS*, p. 17; David J Bodenhamer, 'The Potential of the Spatial Humanities', in D. J. Bodenhamer, J. Corrigan and T. M. Harris, eds., *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2010), p. 23; and Sam Griffiths, 'GIS and Research into Historical "Spaces of Practice": Overcoming the Epistemological Barriers', in A. von Lünen and C. Travis, eds., *History and GIS: Epistemologies, Considerations and Reflections* (Berlin, 2013), p. 168.

<sup>55</sup> A case in point is the location of Æthelthryth's resting place on her journey from Coldingham in Northumbria to Ely, which the *LE* identifies as Ædeldreðestowe, and which has been interpreted as two different places in Lincolnshire, see *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 13, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> Bodenhamer, *The Potential of the Spatial Humanities*, p. 28.

<sup>57</sup> Ian N Gregory and Richard G Healey, 'Historical GIS: Structuring, Mapping and Analysing Geographies of the Past', *Progress in Human Geography*, 31 (2007), p. 650.

exploits its capabilities is limited.<sup>58</sup> Of these, the number of publications demonstrating how the capabilities of a historical GIS have been employed to a greater extent than just its ability to create a map is negligible. In 2013, Faye Taylor used the cost analysis functionality of a GIS, which identifies the most efficient route between two locations, to explore the feasibility of an account contained in a mid-tenth-century miracle collection of a procession of the relics of San Colombano di Bobbio.<sup>59</sup> This study demonstrates some of the capability that is available from a GIS, and, as well as providing her with the information she needed to show that the journey was feasible, the production of the analysis enabled Taylor to draw some conclusions regarding the Bobbio monastery's territorial boundaries and aspirations. This was, however, a small-scale study using a single source, the miracle collection, and a small number of data points, since the collection contained details of only twenty-eight miracles.

As mentioned above, the benefits that a GIS can bring to a historical study such as this thesis have been shown to be through its organisational, its analytical, and its illustrative capabilities. While this holds true regardless of the size of the study being undertaken, it is within larger, collaborative historical research projects where the capabilities of a GIS have been exploited to their fullest extent. The Mapping Medieval Chester project that was delivered in 2009 and that was a collaboration between Swansea University, Queen's University Belfast, and King's College London,<sup>60</sup> and the Linguistic Geographies Gough Map project that was completed in 2011 and

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<sup>58</sup> Knowles and Gregory have probably been the most vocal advocates of the use of GIS in historical research, see for instance Knowles, 'Emerging Trends in Historical GIS', p. 12, where she talks of the 'tremendous possibilities for creative, stimulating research', or Gregory and Healey, 'Historical GIS', p. 645, where they state that 'GIS allows entirely new questions to be asked using completely new techniques'. However, there is recent recognition that the opportunities have not yet been fully exploited, see Alexander von Lünen and Charles Travis, 'Preface', in A. von Lünen and C. Travis, eds., *History and GIS: Epistemologies, Considerations and Reflections* (Berlin, 2013), p. 5, and Anne K Knowles, 'The Contested Nature of Historical GIS', *International Journal of Geographical Information Science*, 28 (2014), p. 206.

<sup>59</sup> Faye Taylor, 'Mapping Miracles: Early Medieval Hagiography and the Potential of GIS', in A. von Lünen and C. Travis, eds., *History and GIS: Epistemologies, Considerations and Reflections* (Berlin, 2013), p. 116.

<sup>60</sup> 'Mapping Medieval Chester', (2009), [www.medievalchester.ac.uk](http://www.medievalchester.ac.uk), accessed 25 May 2018.

run jointly by Queen's University Belfast, the University of Oxford, and King's College London,<sup>61</sup> are two such studies. Mapping Medieval Chester collated medieval cartographic representations and textual references relating to Chester and used a GIS to produce an interactive map which illustrates the city's urban landscape in 1500 and visually reflects its relationships with those locations mentioned in the texts. While the textual descriptions of the city demonstrated how it was perceived by the writers of the time, the combination of the maps and the literary portrayals of places contained within them has helped stimulate explorations of the use and interpretation of space and place within Chester, from which an edited volume was produced in 2011.<sup>62</sup>

Linguistic analysis is also a principal feature of the Linguistic Geographies project. The fourteenth-century Gough Map is one of the earliest known geographically-accurate maps of the British Isles, containing details of towns and cities, rivers, lakes, and other topographical features, as well as a series of red lines that link settlements and that contain what are understood to be distance markers. The Linguistic Geographies project employed both palaeographic and linguistic techniques to explore, analyse, and interpret the map, using a GIS to produce a full digitisation of it and its elements. The digital map was made available for use within GIS software, and has been utilised in this thesis to aid in the identification of pilgrimage routes relating to Æthelthryth. As with the Mapping Medieval Chester project, the Linguistic Geographies team's objectives were both to make the outputs of their research accessible through the production of an interactive web-based map and to provide the framework for further research, in this case initially regarding the Gough Map's origins, provenance, and likely use. The hypotheses addressing these questions from when the project was in its early stages, and which are detailed in Nick Millea's 2007 book,<sup>63</sup> have since been revisited using the study's

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<sup>61</sup> 'Linguistic Geographies', (2011), [www.goughmap.org](http://www.goughmap.org), accessed 5 November 2017.

<sup>62</sup> See Catherine A M Clarke, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place and Identity in Chester, c. 1200-1600* (Cardiff, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Nick Millea, *The Gough Map* (Oxford, 2007).

high-resolution digital image as well as other digital humanities techniques such as hyperspectral analysis and pigment analysis. The application of these processes has revealed two separate fifteenth-century revisions to the fourteenth-century original, although the reasons for the production of the map in the first place still remain a mystery.<sup>64</sup>

Both the Medieval Chester and the Gough Map studies are completed collaborative digital humanities projects that together demonstrate the power of a GIS to assimilate and organise historical sources, to produce clear, informative illustrations of the sources' data, and to engender further research questions and present potential alternative perspectives in the study of medieval space and place. Within this thesis, these three attributes of a historical GIS have been applied to a smaller-scale study, but with the aim of retaining the benefits of its usage evident within the larger projects. Evidence of Æthelthryth's cult has been found within a wide variety of sources, ranging from texts to material culture and archaeology. The visualisations of the sources' geographical distributions, both individually and especially when combined and amalgamated with resources such as the digital Gough Map, have revealed previously unrecognised spatial patterns of venerative practice for Æthelthryth's cult in locations as far apart as Scandinavia and South West England. Tim Cresswell identified the need for new models to be built to help with understanding the complexities of the concept of space.<sup>65</sup> The context in which this statement was made was of localised, social space, and Cresswell's case studies tended to be limited to buildings or local neighbourhoods, but its sentiment can be applied equally to geographically much wider areas. The development of historical GIS has enabled the development of these models, and their application within this thesis has meant that some of the spatial complexities surrounding the cult of Æthelthryth have been identified and unravelled.

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<sup>64</sup> See Catherine Delano-Smith, et al., 'New Light on the Medieval Gough Map of Britain', *Imago Munda*, 69 (2017), especially pp. 6-12.

<sup>65</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Maldon, Massachusetts, 2004), p. 74.

There is a wealth of scholarship that addresses the individual sources that have been used within this thesis, and they are described, and their contribution is analysed at the relevant points within it. However, by outlining above the principal scholarship relating to Æthelthryth, her cult, and the Ely foundation, as well as discussing the studies of Anglo-Saxon saints that are methodologically similar to this thesis, and providing background on the development of GIS within the field of historical research, the context has been defined within which the study of the cult of St Æthelthryth is framed.

### **The Organisation of the Thesis**

The longitudinal nature of this research has revealed a number of key junctures in the life of Æthelthryth's cult which were either turning points in its history or shifts in the focus of its activity, and each of the periods of time between these points is represented by a chapter of the thesis. The first of these covers an interval of just under two hundred years, from 670 until 866. This chapter encompasses evidence of the earliest veneration of Æthelthryth and the translation of her remains by her sister. The translation celebration bears a striking resemblance to that of other female descendants of King Ana, and it is suggested that it is indicative of an attempt to preserve the legacy of the king after the elimination of the male line. This period also contains the first written accounts of Æthelthryth's life, penned by Bede, which came to form the basis of the majority of all later hagiographies of the saint, as well as evidence in the form of a calendar fragment that links Bede's writing with the celebration of Æthelthryth's feast day in Francia. The year 866 saw the monastery sacked by the Vikings, and, but for the advocacy of Bede, this could have signalled the cult's demise. As it was, Bede's *HE*, containing his Life of Æthelthryth, was widely circulated, and ensured the cult's continuation.

Chapter Two begins immediately after the Viking raids and covers a momentous period in the monastery's history. The Benedictine Reforms of the tenth century saw the abbey at Ely

refounded as a Benedictine institution, and this thesis demonstrates that the figure of Æthelthryth was fundamental to the plans of Bishop Æthelwold. His strategy of land acquisition was followed by the introduction of a textual tradition that included a portrayal of the saint which was a manipulation of that of Bede from two hundred and fifty years earlier. The period of prosperity and expansion that followed the reforms of 970 was brought to an end by the Norman Conquest. The aftermath of the Conquest, the installation of Norman abbots, the creation of the bishopric of Ely in 1109, and the collation of the most important text to be produced at Ely, the *LE*, comprise Chapter Three of the thesis, covering the period between 1066 and 1173. The compilation in 1173 of the *LE*, a combination of history, hagiography, miracle collection, and cartulary, is discussed in this chapter, and it is argued that its collation was the culmination of a long-term strategy that aimed to turn Ely from a besieged, isolated community in 1070 into an East Anglian ecclesiastical power a century later, with Æthelthryth's influence and interventions at the core of the plan. A discussion of the significance of the three *vitae* of the saint that were produced within this period, as well as an analysis of the miracle collection that is contained in the *LE*, demonstrate the role the saint played throughout.

The period of time from the end of the twelfth century until the middle of the fifteenth, which comprises Chapter Four, saw cult activity spread out from the shrine centre at Ely, with evidence of the celebration of Æthelthryth's feast days appearing across the country, and even as far as Scandinavia, where it is shown that the spread of calendars mirrors the development of Christianity through Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Analysis of litanies containing her name provide evidence that she was the most prolific Anglo-Saxon saint whose invocation was being requested in the high Middle Ages, while relic lists from a number of major shrine centres show that Æthelthryth's relics were attracting pilgrims and visitors from across the country.

Æthelthryth's example was being used for a number of different purposes during this time, and it is clear that the malleability of her character meant that her suitability for whatever purpose she was employed was not in doubt. The monasteries of Chatteris in Cambridgeshire and

Campsey Ash in Suffolk wrote lives of Æthelthryth as a means of persuading benefactors to donate to their foundations, while towards the end of the period, a Life from Wilton Abbey in Wiltshire was written either to admonish the nuns whose interpretation of the Rule of St Benedict was not up to the standard the local bishop expected, or to portray the saint as a nationalistic icon in Henry V's campaigns against the French. This was a three-hundred-year period during which cult activity was being controlled and co-ordinated through the monastic institutions.

The final one hundred years of Æthelthryth's cult, running from the middle of the fifteenth century until the middle of the sixteenth and which is covered in Chapter Five, sees a shift in the control of the cult activity, away from the monasteries and cathedrals and towards the parishes and the laity. The number and geographical distribution of images of Æthelthryth appearing on the walls, in the windows, and on the rood-screens of parish churches, and the occurrences of church dedications to the saint are evidence of the venerative practices of the parishioners of local churches, and define the relationships lay congregations were building with the saints they chose to venerate. Finally, evidence is presented of the journeys which pilgrims could have undertaken in the time leading up to the Reformation, produced through the amalgamation of the variety of sources used throughout this thesis overlaid with known medieval roads to reveal patterns of routeways. Four of these potential routes are analysed, indicating links with shrine centres and places with significance to the cult of Æthelthryth, and suggesting reasons for their existence. This chapter, and also this thesis, concludes at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, at which juncture the shrine of Æthelthryth was destroyed and her relics were disbursed.

The aims of this thesis were to define the geographic extent of Æthelthryth's cult, to understand the factors that contributed to its longevity, and to gauge its impact. Its five chapters, covering a period of almost nine hundred years, demonstrate that the geographic boundaries of her cult



were as flexible as the portrayal of her character, and that in fact they are better depicted as a number of spheres of influence, each of which has been defined by the volume and nature of the evidence of venerative activity presented in this thesis. When considered together, they paint a picture of a cult with influence that at various points in its existence reached far from its epicentre in East Anglia, stretching into Northumbria and the southwest of England, across to both the east and south of the country, and into Francia and later Scandinavia. The different portrayals of the character of Æthelthryth that are revealed from the narratives of her life and after-life, beginning with Bede's in the eighth century and continuing right up to that contained in the Wilton Life of seven hundred years later, demonstrate that this flexibility was a principal factor contributing to the longevity of her cult. St Æthelthryth is definitely shown to be 'a saint for all seasons', and the utilisation of her character and the harnessing of the power her relics were perceived to have wielded throughout the lifetime of her cult are evidence of the impact she had.

Her cult was established by her sister potentially as a way of retaining the legacy of their father after the extinction of the male line, and her designation in the charters as custodian of Ely's landholdings in the tenth century was recognition of the power she was believed to have been able to bring to bear to safeguard the monastery's interests. The figure of Æthelthryth was central to both Æthelwold's goal of introducing the Rule of St Benedict to the English foundations and to the Norman bishops of Ely's objective of establishing the diocese of Ely, and her importance could not have been better demonstrated than through the overt display of power that were the translations of her relics in 970 and 1106. Finally, the images of her to be found in parish churches, the number of which hint at how many existed prior to the iconoclasm of the Reformation and the English Civil War, and the prevalence of the occurrence of her name in ecclesiastical calendars, litanies, and relic lists are demonstrative of the power of her relics and story to attract pilgrims and visitors. Using the characteristics of geographic reach, longevity, and impact as the definition of the influence of a saint's cult undoubtedly

confirms that the cult of St Æthelthryth can be described as influential, and this reaffirms the conclusions of previous scholars who have considered its various aspects. However, what this thesis succeeds in demonstrating through its longitudinal, interdisciplinary approach is the diverse and symbiotic nature of this influence. An Anglo-Saxon saint's cult's long-term survival and success was dependent upon both its ability to constantly evolve in response to events and circumstances that affected it, and upon those who were themselves powerful enough to be able to recognise, harness, and utilise its saint's power.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **670 TO 866 – THE BIRTH OF A NATIONAL (AND INTERNATIONAL) CULT**

By the end of the seventh century, the veneration of the relics of local saints had become incorporated into the religious practice of the Anglo-Saxon church to such an extent that John Blair has referred to this period as the 'English age of saints'.<sup>1</sup> For the most part their cults remained local, however, with their spheres of influence confined to a relatively small area in the immediate vicinity of the foundation within which the saint's relics were held. In order that knowledge of their presence and power could be spread to a wider regional, or even national, audience, something more than the patronage of the local community was needed. There were a small number of saints from this period whose story and reputation managed to transcend these local constraints, of which Æthelthryth of Ely is an example. Long-lived and geographically far-reaching cults were not established or maintained by accident, however, and the efforts to promote the cult of Æthelthryth commenced with the first translation of her relics in 695 by her sister and successor as abbess of Ely, Seaxburh.

Æthelthryth was one of a number of women with familial connections to King Ana of East Anglia (d. 653 or 654) – she was one of his daughters – who were named as saints in what could be seen as a co-ordinated effort to maintain or increase the dynastic power of Ana and his descendants after their deaths, and to a geographically wider audience. If this was the intention, however, then evidence of its success is limited, and the cults of the majority of these female saints were for the most part restricted to the localities within which they were known prior to their deaths. While the reach of the cults themselves remained local however, the traditions surrounding their translations and promotion appear to have been more readily

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<sup>1</sup> John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 141.

shared. Descriptions of the ceremony and rituals performed at the translation of Æthelthryth's remains by her sister bear a striking resemblance to those relating to her niece and stepsister at the abbey of Faremoutier-en-Brie a few years earlier, and hence are likely to represent the first evidence of these types of practices being imported into the Anglo-Saxon church from the Continent.

A number of miraculous events were associated with Æthelthryth, both from when she was alive and shortly following her death, but despite these, Seaxburh's efforts to promote the cult were no guarantee of success. The events that occurred during Æthelthryth's life and those up to and beyond her translation needed to be disseminated much more widely and by a trusted and renowned authority. At the beginning of the eighth century, this authority was the monk from Jarrow, Bede. Æthelthryth's inclusion in both Bede's *Martyrologium* and *HE* was the platform from which knowledge of her cult spread to the world outside the Isle of Ely. But for the intervention of Bede, the timeframe covered in this chapter could easily have represented the entire lifespan of Æthelthryth's cult, and even despite this, this two-century period did still encompass its birth, expansion and, ultimately, its near-extinction at the hands of the Vikings.

Despite the sacking of the abbey at Ely in the ninth century, however, enough knowledge of its saint had been disseminated to ensure that her power and influence were not completely extinguished. Bede's lives of Æthelthryth were the basis for all subsequent texts that told the story of the saint, even though most of their authors would alter, embellish, or expand Bede's version according to the audience for whom they were writing or the particular message they were trying to convey. In doing this, the medieval authors were only emulating Bede himself, since it is shown here that he himself used elements of Æthelthryth's story and character as examples to the Northumbrian church of how it could peacefully co-exist, under the umbrella of Christianity, with the other kingdoms of Britain. Bede's works, and especially his *HE*, were copied and reproduced extensively in the years subsequent to his death in 735, so much so that

the scriptorium at Wearmouth-Jarrow is reported to have struggled to keep up with the demand.<sup>2</sup> His popularity was not confined to Britain, and in fact an area that was one of the largest recipients of his works was the Frankish region of continental Europe. Recognition of Æthelthryth's feast-day of 23 June has been found in a fragment of a ninth-century ecclesiastical calendar from Bavaria, and this very early evidence of recognition of her cult outside the British Isles is shown here to have probably stemmed from the journeys of eighth- and ninth-century missionaries such as Boniface, who would have been familiar with Bede's writing.

As well as a biblical commentator and theologian, Bede is considered by scholars to be a reliable historian,<sup>3</sup> and the credence that this assertion gives to his work adds weight to the likely truthfulness of those of his narratives particularly associated with Æthelthryth. In his account of the opening of Æthelthryth's tomb Bede included the observations of witnesses with the specific aim of adding to its authenticity, and Bede's detailed accounts of other major events from his recent past tend to point to a historian for whom being factually correct was an important consideration.<sup>4</sup> This assumption is equally applicable to his accounts of the events pertaining to Æthelthryth.

The *HE* tells us that in 671 Æthelthryth's husband, Ecgrith, finally agreed to her request to enter monastic life, and she was subsequently accepted into the abbey at Coldingham in Northumbria. It then states simply that a year later she became abbess of Ely 'where she built a convent and became the virgin mother of many virgins vowed to God'.<sup>5</sup> The sparsity of detail in

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<sup>2</sup> Felice Lifshitz, 'Bede, Martyrology', in T. Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (London, 2000), p. 173. She says that all of Bede's works quickly became 'best-sellers'.

<sup>3</sup> See in particular Antonia Gransden, 'Bede's Reputation as an Historian in Medieval England', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32 (2011), pp. 399-403.

<sup>4</sup> In particular, Bede's description of the debate surrounding the date of Easter and the Synod of Whitby in 664 shows how meticulous he was in recording events exactly as he felt they had happened, see *HE*, Book 3, chs. 25 and 26, pp. 294-311 for his account, and David H Farmer, ed., *Bede: Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London, 1990), pp. 21-22 for scholarly commentary on the detail Bede provides.

<sup>5</sup> 'ubi, constructo monasterio, virginum Deo devotarum perplurium mater virgo', *HE*, Book 4, ch. 19, p. 291.

Bede's narrative of Æthelthryth's life prior to the foundation of the abbey at Ely is at odds with that of his descriptions of her time as abbess, her death, and the translation of her relics. Later hagiographers' accounts tended to provide more in-depth, but usually uncorroborated, details for the periods of her life omitted by Bede, maybe because he had not been aware of them, or they did not fit with the message he was trying to convey, or possibly because they could not be authenticated to the standards with which he would have been satisfied. However, the absence of these events from Bede's narrative does not necessarily preclude them from being significant in the context of Æthelthryth's influence while she was alive, or the development of her cult in the eighth century. Archaeological evidence has helped to corroborate the circumstances surrounding accounts of miracles performed by Æthelthryth during her journey from Coldingham to Ely in 672, together with the foundation of churches at the locations the miracles took place. The earliest record of these events is in a *vita* based on Bede's and contained in the *LE*. The *LE* states that the miracles took place and the churches were constructed by Æthelthryth in two Lincolnshire locations, a village called *Alftham* and a meadow named *Ædeldreðestowe*.<sup>6</sup> While nothing has been found that specifically links the saint herself with the construction of the original monastic buildings, later medieval churches erected on both sites were dedicated to Æthelthryth, and artefacts discovered through excavation at *Alftham* point to it having been an Anglo-Saxon monastic site. Being able through the archaeology to accurately date their founding to the late seventh century does add weight to the factual accuracy of the twelfth-century account, while the dedications provide evidence of the longevity of the links with Æthelthryth. Assuming the validity of the assertion that Æthelthryth was responsible for, or at least instrumental in, the establishment of the churches in these two locations, then it is reasonable to conclude that the stories of the miracles she had performed were very probably being recounted locally both soon after their foundation and shortly after her death.

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<sup>6</sup> *LE*(B), Book I, ch. 13, p. 30.

Consequently, these locations may well be the sites of the earliest evidence for elements of Æthelthryth's life being used to promote or enhance a church's local standing and reputation.

The similarities in the details of the translation of Æthelthryth's remains by her sister with those of her niece and stepsister in Faremoûtier-en-Brie point to an attempt to preserve the legacy of the dynasty of King Ana of East Anglia through the veneration of his female descendants' shrines. However, it is safe to conclude that Æthelthryth would not have received the attention she did were it not for the inclusion of her narrative in Bede's works, and in fact it is probably through his choice of her as role model that her cult survived at all beyond the middle of the ninth century. Furthermore, it was on the back of the popularity of Bede's writing that knowledge of Æthelthryth and her story was disseminated not just wider in Anglo-Saxon England than Northumbria and East Anglia, but across to the Continent as well. The writing of hagiography with the intention of using it as a didactic tool was, while not unheard of, a relatively new phenomenon in the early eighth century, and Bede's role in establishing this type of narrative tool was key.<sup>7</sup> The selection therefore of Æthelthryth as one of only two female Anglo-Saxon saints whose lives were recounted in the *HE* was no accident. His portrayal of her as virginal, humble, and pious was a powerful one, especially when juxtaposed against that of the other female saint, Hild of Whitby, in Bede's eyes a wise and influential leader, and his description of Æthelthryth paved the way for the majority of the lives of the saint that were to be written over the subsequent five hundred years.

### **The First Evidence of the Influence of Æthelthryth**

The *LE* states that its records of the events that occurred during Æthelthryth's journey from Coldingham to Ely in 672 were 'a well-known matter, related by our forefathers and so related

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<sup>7</sup> Gransden, 'Bede's Reputation as an Historian in Medieval England', p. 399.

to us; it is something which the whole district in which it had happened remembers and recounts as if it were yesterday'.<sup>8</sup> The *LE*'s author's choice of language here, citing folklore and referring back to a time considerably earlier than its twelfth-century compilation, is intriguing. Despite the assertion that the miraculous events the author described took place at some unspecified historical juncture, this is certainly not compelling enough to claim irrefutably that they are the earliest evidence of the influence that Æthelthryth was able to bring to bear. The absence of any corroborating detail in Bede's *HE* is also telling. It indicates that Bede was unaware of any noteworthy events that took place as Æthelthryth travelled south, or that their inclusion would have detracted from the message he was trying to convey by including her story within his work, or that the accounts would not have stood up to the level of scrutiny he had required before he was satisfied of their veracity. It is only through recent (i.e. twentieth-century) archaeological excavation combined with the existence of early parish church dedications that Æthelthryth's presence in either of the places named in the *LE* can be verified with any degree of certainty.

The events to which the passage in the *LE* refers are said to have taken place on two occasions when Æthelthryth was resting during her journey southwards towards East Anglia. In the first of these, the *LE* describes how, after crossing the River Humber into Lincolnshire and coming ashore at Wintringham (now Winteringham), she travelled for about ten furlongs before she arrived at a settlement called *Alftham* where during her stay she constructed a church.<sup>9</sup> The village of West Halton is probably the *Alftham* to which the account refers, since the parish church there has a pre-Norman dedication to Æthelthryth (actually to Etheldreda, a derivation of Æthelthryth's name). The turning to West Halton is little more than one mile, or eight

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<sup>8</sup> '*Res est valde opinata et seniorum nostrorum relatione nobis tradita quam omnis provincia in qua acciderat, velut hesternum, recitare solet et meminit.*' *LE*(B), Book I, ch. 13, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. 13, p. 30.



furlongs, from Winteringham, and place-name analysis has indicated that Halton could be a derivation of *Alftham*.<sup>10</sup>

Archaeological investigations have produced evidence to reinforce the claim that this is the location of Æthelthryth's stay. Excavations in the area have revealed the remains of two monastic sites dating from the seventh or eighth centuries. In the early 1980s, traces of a defensive bank and ditch were unearthed just to the north of the church at West Halton,<sup>11</sup> while a much larger-scale excavation between 1989 and 1991 at Flixborough, about five miles southwest of West Halton, produced finds and the remains of buildings pointing to a large, monastic settlement with an earliest date of the late seventh century.<sup>12</sup> Of specific interest, and which confirmed the site as an early religious foundation, was the discovery of a small lead plaque containing seven Anglo-Saxon names, possibly followed by the word 'nun' (see Figure 1, below). The plaque demonstrates a degree of literacy for the period that was confined primarily to clerics in religious establishments and has been interpreted as a commemorative list of either benefactors to the monastery or of the identities of those whose relics would have been stored in a reliquary to which it would have been attached.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See David Roffe's unpublished local studies article relating to Domesday Lincolnshire, David Roffe, 'St Æthelthryth and the Monastery of Alftham', (2000), <http://www.roffe.co.uk/alftham.htm>, accessed 24 January 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Susan M Youngs, et al., 'Medieval Britain and Ireland in 1982', *Medieval Archaeology*, 27 (1983), p. 186.

<sup>12</sup> The excavations have been written up in several volumes by Chris Loveluck, the lead archaeologist from the Humber Archaeological Partnership who undertook the project, see Chris P Loveluck, ed., *Excavations at Flixborough* (Oxford, 2007-2010), 4 vols., with earlier post-excavation reports appearing in 1991, see Ben Whitwell, 'Flixborough', *Current Archaeology*, 11 (1991), and Ben Whitwell, 'Flixborough's Royal Heritage', *Minerva*, 2 (1991).

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Leahy and Michelle P Brown, 'Selected Finds from a High-Status Site at Flixborough, South Humberside', in L. Webster and J. Backhouse, eds., *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600-900* (London, 1991), p. 95; Elisabeth Okasha, 'A Second Supplement to Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 21 (1992), pp. 45-47.



Figure 1. The Flixborough Lead Plaque.<sup>14</sup>

The second Lincolnshire site mentioned in the *LE* is also a place where Æthelthryth stopped and rested on her journey south to Ely. It is described as ‘agreeable’ and ‘sprinkled all about with flowers of various colours’,<sup>15</sup> and is the site of one of the earliest recorded miracles performed by Æthelthryth while she was alive. She had fallen asleep in a field after securing her wooden staff in the ground next to her, and discovered on waking up that it had sprouted branches and leaves which subsequently grew into the ‘biggest ash tree of all the trees in the region’.<sup>16</sup> As a result of this miracle, she is recorded as having founded a church there dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and the settlement became known as *Ædeldreðestowe*, or ‘the resting place of Æthelthryth’. The Marian dedication persuaded both David Roffe and Barrie Cox that the location of *Ædeldreðestowe* was the village of Stow St Mary, just north of Lincoln.<sup>17</sup> However, St

<sup>14</sup> Chris P Loveluck, ‘A High-Status Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Flixborough, Lincolnshire’, *Antiquity*, 72 (1998), p. 155. The plaque was found in the occupation layer of the principal building of the site and now held by the Archaeology Unit of Humberside County Council. The transcription reads:

+ ALDUINI:ALDHERI:|HAEODHAED:EODUINI:|EDELG/YD:EONBE/RECH[T]|EDELUI[I]N:

<sup>15</sup> ‘*videt delectabilem*’ and ‘*undique aspersum floribus variorum colorum*’, *LE*(B), Book I, ch. 13, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> ‘*fraxinus maxima cunctarum arborum illius*’, *ibid.*, Book I, ch. 13, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> David Roffe, ‘The Seventh Century Monastery of Stow Green, Lincolnshire’, *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 21 (1986), p. 49; Barrie Cox, ‘The Pattern of Old English burh in Early Lindsey’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), p. 49.

Mary is not an unusual dedication, and Stow (or various forms of it) is a very common occurrence in English place-names. It is more likely that *Ædeldreðestowe* was the settlement of Stow Green, a now-deserted village about thirty-five miles south of Stow St Mary, which in the twelfth century contained a church dedicated to Æthelthryth, and which was recorded in the thirteenth century as holding a fair annually on 23 June, one of Æthelthryth's feast days.<sup>18</sup>

There is a third very early parish church dedication to Æthelthryth, which is also the most remote of all of her dedications, that of St Etheldreda's church at Hyssington in Montgomeryshire (now part of Powys) which comes under the diocese of Hereford. Records of the transfer of deeds for a chapel at Hyssington exist from 1316, and so a church was on this site from some time earlier than this, and one of the two pre-Reformation bells in the church bears the inscription 'SANCTA ETHELDREDA. ORA PRO NOBIS', which translates as 'St Etheldreda. Pray for us'.<sup>19</sup> There is, however, evidence of a far earlier link with Hyssington to Æthelthryth through her father, King Ana. The *LE* recounts the story of a miraculous vision of Æthelthryth praying in a church that was situated 'on the border between the Britons and the English, [which] took its name from the blessed virgin Æthelthryth'.<sup>20</sup> The miracle story is highly unusual in that the version that appears in the *LE* is a fourth-hand account of what happened. It is a transcription of a letter sent to the monks of Ely by Osbert of Clare, prior of Westminster Abbey (died in or after 1158), in which he describes the vision as it was recounted to him by another Osbert, the prior of Daventry, who was himself told of the miracle by the family of the woman who experienced it.<sup>21</sup> Both John Williamson (the editor of the volume containing Osbert of Clare's letters) and Rosalind Love have identified the church at Hyssington as the place where

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1998), p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> John B Willans, 'A History of the Parish of Hyssington', *Collections, Historical and Archaeological Relating to Montgomeryshire*, 35 (1910), pp. 201-202.

<sup>20</sup> '... *que in Britonum confinio et Anglorum posita nomen a beata virgine obtinuit Æðeldreða*', *LE(B)*, Book III, ch. 43, p. 282.

<sup>21</sup> See Edward W Williamson, ed., *The Letters of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster* (London, 1929), pp. 116-119.

the miracle occurred.<sup>22</sup> Since there are no other churches with dedications to Æthelthryth on the border between Wales and England this is almost certainly the case, which would mean that the date of Hyssington's dedication is no later than c. 1150. The foundation of the church on this site could well date to five hundred years earlier than this, however, as within Osbert of Clare's letter, he relates how King Ana had constructed the church while returning from the West Country to East Anglia, to celebrate what had been a successful visit to relations he had in the area.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 219; Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. xlii.

<sup>23</sup> *LE(B)*, Book III, ch. 43, p. 282.

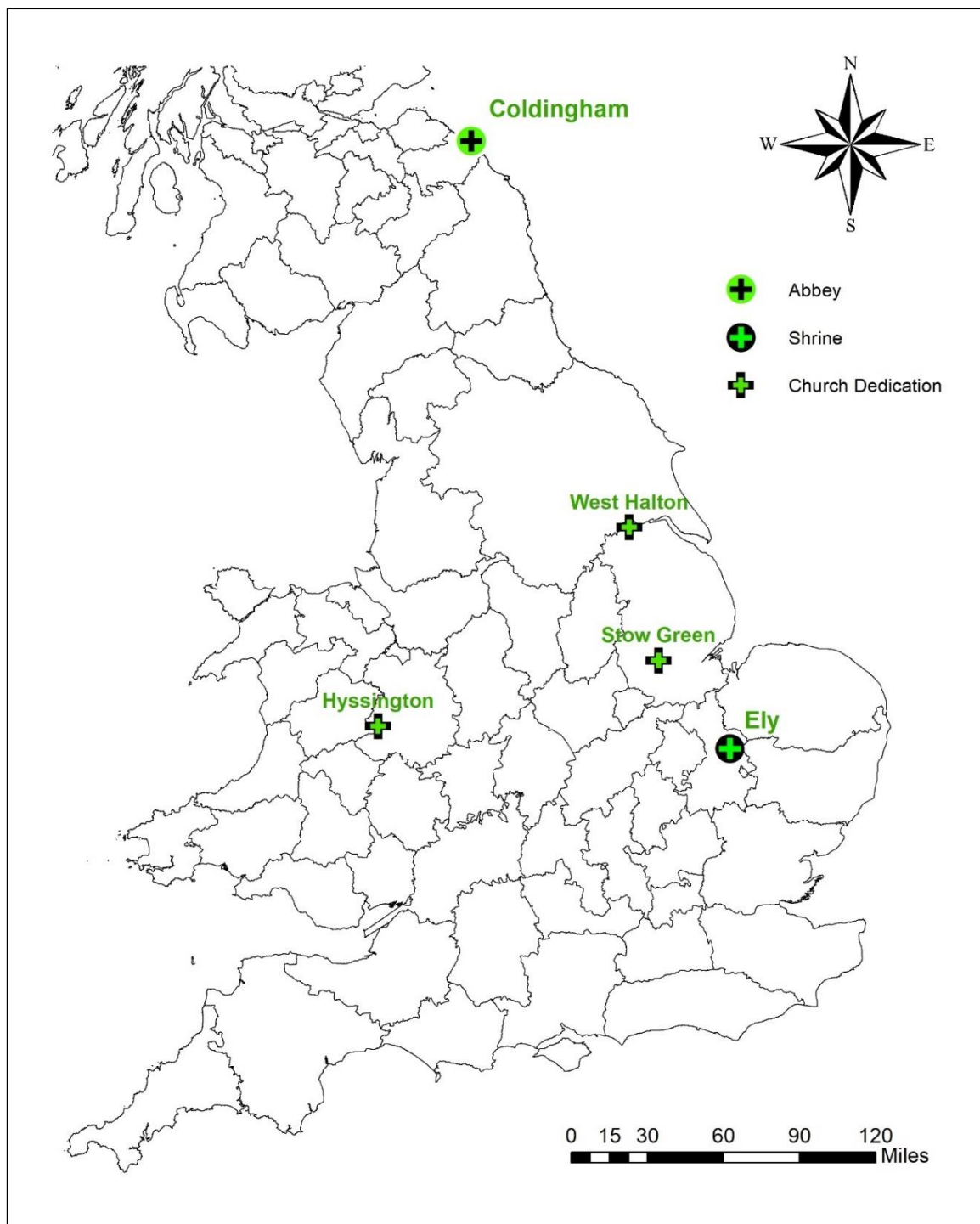


Figure 2. The Early Church Dedications to St Æthelthryth.

For the two Lincolnshire churches of West Halton and Stow Green, and for that of Hyssington, the significance of their dedications stems not only from the places themselves but also from

the events that took place there. West Halton was the first place Æthelthryth stayed after crossing the Humber estuary, which importantly also signified her exit from Northumbria into the kingdom of Mercia, possibly for the first time since she had left East Anglia thirteen years earlier on the way to marry her second husband Ecgfrith. That she chose to establish a church there underlines its significance, and the dedication of the parish church to her is a reflection of that. The same is true for Hyssington, and the parallels between Æthelthryth's experience at West Halton and that of her father in the far west of Mercia are plain. Ana was returning from a visit to the West Country (presumably Wales), and the *LE* states that 'on his return, he constructed [an] edifice'<sup>24</sup> which is now assumed to be the church at Hyssington. Today the village is on the Welsh side of the border (although only just – England lies only a quarter of a mile to the east) whereas the Anglo-Saxon border between Powys and Mercia as defined by the route of Offa's Dyke and the River Camlad was approximately two miles to the west of the village, placing Hyssington just inside Mercia at the time Ana was travelling. Consequently, just like Æthelthryth on her return from Northumbria, Ana had crossed a river to return to Mercia and founded a church at the first place he stopped. Both Hyssington and Stow Green were the foci of miracles performed by Æthelthryth, and all three places were the sites of churches founded at them as a direct result of significant events that had taken place there previously. West Halton and Stow Green were important locations on her journey to Ely to escape Ecgfrith and found the monastery. When she appears in the church at Hyssington, she refers to herself as 'the holy virgin, whose integrity of maidenhood is united with the heavenly Bridegroom'.<sup>25</sup> Together, the existence of these three places reinforces Æthelthryth's desire to have joined a monastic community, thus having enabled her to achieve her goal of keeping her virginity intact.

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<sup>24</sup> *'In reditu vero construxit hanc'*, *ibid.*, Book III, ch. 43, p. 282.

<sup>25</sup> *'... virgo sacra nomen meum dicitur, cuius virginitatis integritas celesti sponso copulator'*, *ibid.*, Book III, ch. 43, p. 282.

The dedications to Æthelthryth served to memorialise the link between the saint, the location, and what happened there, and acted as lasting reminders to those who visited the churches of the trials which she had had to endure to protect her virginity. As the sites of significant events in the story of Æthelthryth, it is likely that these churches would have tried to capitalise on the events that had taken place there, using them as a means of attracting the local community and enhancing their standing and reputation within the area. As such, and with evidence dating their establishment to the late seventh century, they are probably the earliest examples of the saint being used to promote the churches where the existence of strong links to Æthelthryth could be exploited.

### **The Translation of the Relics and the Establishment of the Cult**

After her death in 679, Æthelthryth was placed in a wooden coffin which subsequently became the site of a number of unspecified healing miracles.<sup>26</sup> Sixteen years later her remains were uncovered by her sister Seaxburh, whereupon the tumour on her neck was found to have healed, leaving only a scar, with the rest of the body completely intact. Her body was removed from the coffin and placed in a much larger stone tomb that was located in a more prominent position in the abbey. While the translation of relics from east to west had been a feature of western Christianity for a century or more,<sup>27</sup> what is striking here is the very early date of the opening of the original tomb and the transplanting of Æthelthryth's remains into a much grander sarcophagus in the same location, which was situated and displayed to afford much

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<sup>26</sup> *HE*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 392-393. The wooden coffin is also mentioned in the account of Æthelthryth's death in the *LE*, see *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 21, p. 40, and is subsequently described as having healing properties of its own, see *ibid.*, Book I, ch. 30, p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance Patrick J Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1978), ch. 1, Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1982), and Patrick J Geary, 'Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics', in A. Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), for the background and discussion regarding the transfer of relics from the Near East into western churches in the early medieval period. For their introduction specifically into the Anglo-Saxon church, see David W Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), especially pp. 1-20.

greater access for those wishing to visit it. Bede's description in the *HE* provides us with a detailed illustration of the preparations that had been made prior to Æthelthryth's tomb being opened and the activities that took place once her incorrupt body had been revealed. In anticipation of the translation of the remains from the original burial site into the abbey church, Seaxburh had instructed that a stone coffin be found to replace the wooden one in which her sister had been interred. Bede's account tells us that a party of monks sailed out from Ely and happened upon a white marble, probably Roman, sarcophagus at a place called Grantchester (now on the outskirts of Cambridge), which they brought back with them. Once the wooden coffin had been opened and it was found that Æthelthryth's body had not decayed, her corpse was removed and ceremonially washed and re-clothed before being placed inside the marble sarcophagus. Her body was found to fit into the new tomb perfectly, as though it had been made especially for her, and it was placed in an elevated position in the church, becoming the focal point for veneration and liturgy.<sup>28</sup>

All the elements of Æthelthryth's translation ceremony, from the fortuitous find of the marble tomb to its placing in the centre of the abbey church at Ely, point to Seaxburh's premeditated intention to promote her sister to posthumous sainthood, and to position the shrine as a pilgrimage destination. Seaxburh's arrival at Ely during Æthelthryth's tenure as abbess was noted in the *LE*, and almost immediately miracles were being recorded there, some of them being attributed to Æthelthryth herself, an indication that in fact the scene was being set some time before her death for her elevation to sainthood.<sup>29</sup> The planning and preparation undertaken prior to Æthelthryth's acclamation as a saint gives the impression of a tradition that was being followed. However, the comparatively early date of Æthelthryth's translation has been mentioned above, and in fact there are very few recorded translation ceremonies in Anglo-Saxon England by the end of the seventh century, meaning that any traditions emulated

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<sup>28</sup> *HE*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 394-395.

<sup>29</sup> *LE(B)*, Book I, chs. 18 and 19, pp. 35-38.



by Seaxburh would probably have been copied from beyond the Anglo-Saxon borders. Aside from Æthelthryth, only five Anglo-Saxon translations have been identified: Augustine at Canterbury (died c. 609); Aidan at Lindisfarne (651); Cedd at Lastingham (664); Ceadda (or Chad) at Lichfield (672); and Cuthbert at Durham (687), and of these only Cuthbert's has been documented in anything like the same detail as that of the Ely saint.<sup>30</sup> Some similarities do exist between elements of these ceremonies and that of Æthelthryth. For instance, Chad's corpse was housed in a reliquary that was designed to provide access to the pilgrims visiting it in its location at the centre of St Peter's church in Lichfield,<sup>31</sup> while the site of Cuthbert's translated remains is described by Bede in his *Vita S. Cuthberti* as an elevated double monument which comprised both the original and the new tombs, located at the south side of the altar of the church at Durham.<sup>32</sup> However, sufficient differences remain to cast doubt on any assertion that Æthelthryth's translation was based on one, or indeed a combination, of these ceremonies. The origins of the rituals described by Bede for Æthelthryth and Cuthbert can be traced much further afield than Anglo-Saxon England, in fact to sixth- and seventh-century Francia, and there are similarities between the characteristics of translations recorded there and in England at this time, as well as a familial link between the promotion of shrines in Faremoutier-en-Brie in Frankish Gaul and that of Æthelthryth at Ely.

In Gaul, the translation of the remains of Bishop Gregory of Langres (died c. 540) was recorded later in the sixth century by Gregory of Tours in his work *Liber Vitae Patrum*, where he stated that a new apse had been built at the church of St John at Dijon by the bishop's son and successor, Tetricius, to house the new sarcophagus. An audience of local clergy had been assembled to celebrate the translation and during the ceremony the lid of the tomb had been

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<sup>30</sup> Thacker, *The Making of a Local Saint*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>31</sup> *HE*, Book 4, ch. 3, pp. 344-345.

<sup>32</sup> 'Bede's Life of St Cuthbert', in B. Colgrave, ed., *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge, 1940), ch. XLII, pp. 290-295.

removed, whereupon Gregory of Langres' body was found to be incorrupt.<sup>33</sup> There are clear parallels with Æthelthryth's translation here: the ceremony at Dijon was conceived by a relative and successor to the bishop with the intention of moving the tomb to a much more accessible location where veneration of the remains could take place; the translation took place in front of an audience who were able to witness any miraculous events, and were subsequently able to publicise them; and the coffin was opened during the ceremony to reveal the intact body inside. Despite the similarities in the features of the ceremony and the evident aims of Tetricius at Dijon and Seaxburh at Ely to facilitate the establishment of cults with the tombs of Gregory and Æthelthryth at their centres, there is, however, no directly identifiable link between the two sites to indicate that Ely had imitated the ceremony from Dijon a century earlier.

A more tangible connection can be found to the translations of the remains of an abbess, Æthelburh and a nun, Eorcongota, both of Faremoutier-en-Brie, whose ceremonies took place between 660 and 670. Eorcongota was the daughter of Seaxburh, and therefore the niece of Æthelthryth, while Æthelburh was their stepsister. Both women had arrived at Faremoutier by way of Kent where Seaxburh had been a nun before moving to Ely. Eorcongota was held in high regard by Bede, who dedicated a chapter of the *HE* to her, describing her 'many wonders and miraculous signs',<sup>34</sup> before giving a detailed account of her death and the removal of her remains three days afterwards, at which point 'so sweet a fragrance arose from the depths of the sepulchre that it seemed ... as if stores of balsam had been unsealed.'<sup>35</sup> In the same chapter Bede also described the translation of Æthelburh to a specially-built church, seven years after her initial burial in a simple coffin.<sup>36</sup> In an act that was replicated at the tomb of Æthelthryth thirty years later, Æthelburh's incorrupt body was washed and wrapped in fresh material before

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<sup>33</sup> Edward James, ed., *Life of the Fathers: Gregory of Tours* (Liverpool, 1991), ch. VII, pp. 63-64.

<sup>34</sup> '*multa quidem ... opera uirtutem et signa miraculorum*', *HE*, Book 3, ch. 8, pp. 238-239.

<sup>35</sup> '*tantae flagrantia suauitatis ab imis ebulliuit, ut cunctis ... quasi opobalsami cellaria esse uiderentur aperta*', *ibid.*, Book 3, ch. 8, pp. 240-241.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 3, ch. 8, pp. 240-241.

being encased in her new tomb and placed in a central and elevated position in the church. The architectural design and internal layout of the buildings that housed the relics were heavily influenced by the positioning of the tomb and visitors' access to it from very early on, as was evident from the translations of the seventh century which usually involved unearthing a buried coffin and replacing it with a raised sarcophagus located at the heart of the church. The accessibility, visibility, and proximity of the shrine to the people visiting it were the key factors the Anglo-Saxon churchmen took into account when deciding where to place the tomb, and these considerations continued to be of paramount importance through into the high Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup>

As Alan Thacker states, it is highly likely that Seaxburh referred to the rituals to which her stepsister and daughter were subjected at Faremoûtier when she was planning the ceremony at Ely, and he suggests that the Gaulish monastery was in fact the gateway through which the ceremonial practices of translation initially passed from Francia to England.<sup>38</sup> This means that Æthelthryth's translation would have signified the commencement in England of a tradition of shrine promotion which placed the relics of the saint literally at the centre of the cult, with the tomb prominently located on a raised platform at or near to the altar of the church, having been moved there against a backdrop of ceremony and miraculous occurrences. The presence of the invited audience of local clerics and other witnesses ensured that the saint's intact remains were revealed to a large number of people who could then have acted as the shrine's promoters, telling and retelling the story of how after sixteen years Æthelthryth's body had remained intact and the tumour on her neck had healed.

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<sup>37</sup> This was evidence of the enduring Merovingian influence on the translation practices that were imported from Francia in the seventh century, see John Crook, 'The Enshrinement of Local Saints in Francia and England', in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe, eds., *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 206-207.

<sup>38</sup> Alan Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint', in *ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

The transfer of translation traditions from Francia into the Anglo-Saxon church of the seventh century takes on an added significance because of the close familial links between the nuns of Ely and their counterparts at Faremoûtier-en-Brie. The similarities between the translation rituals of Seaxburh's sister, stepsister, and daughter as described above are clear, with the obvious link between them being Seaxburh herself. It is not recorded whether Seaxburh was present at the translations at Faremoûtier, but it is probable that she would have attended those of her daughter and stepsister and subsequently introduced the practices she had witnessed there to the translation of Æthelthryth at Ely almost three decades later.

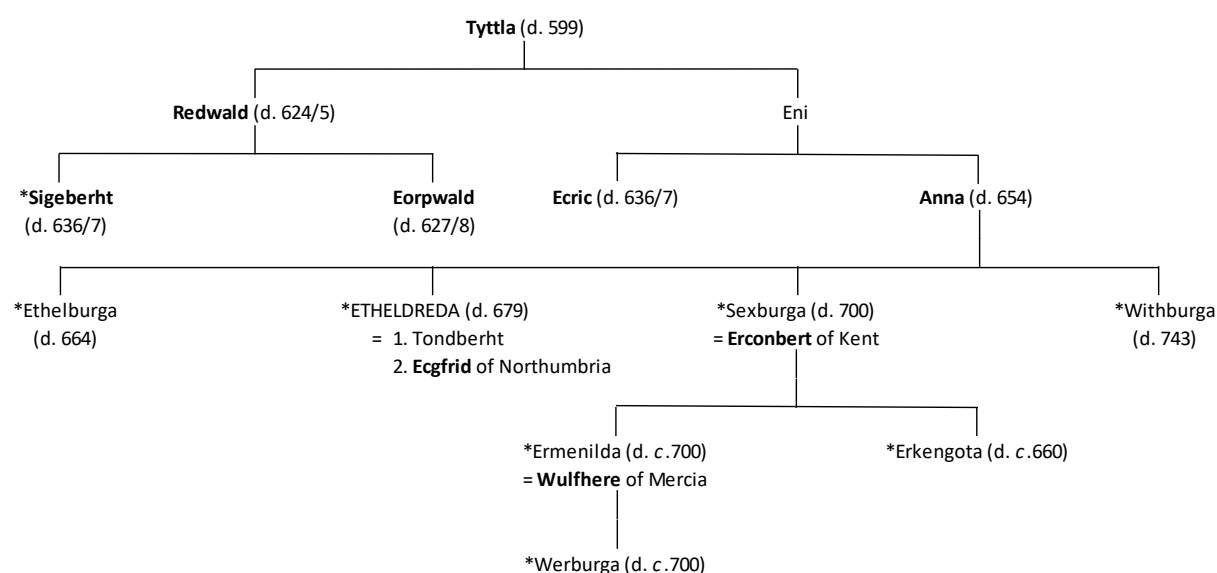


Figure 3. Selected Family Tree of King Anna of East Anglia.<sup>39</sup>

(Kings are shown in **bold** and saints are indicated by an asterisk. The family tree uses alternative spellings to those used elsewhere within this thesis for some of the names. A list of these alternatives can be found on page ix, above.)

<sup>39</sup> John Maddison, *Ely Cathedral, Design and Meaning* (Ely, 2000), p. 3.

Seaxburh, Æthelthryth, and Æthelburh were all daughters of King Ana, while Eorcongota was his granddaughter. All four of Ana's daughters and both of his granddaughters were proclaimed saints, and both Æthelthryth and Seaxburh were married into the nobility of regions with which Ana wanted to establish political allegiances – Æthelthryth first to Tondberht of South Gyrwe and then to Ecgfrith of Northumbria, and Seaxburh to Eorcenberht of Kent.<sup>40</sup> Ana's hold on East Anglia was never certain, with Mercia, under the rule of Penda, a constant threat to the west, especially in respect of the disputed territory of the Middle Angles within what is now the East Midlands.<sup>41</sup> It is wholly conceivable that Ana was therefore continually trying to find ways of securing the legacy of his dynastic family, with the marriages of his daughters to influential leaders in nearby regions one obvious strategy. Since Ana's death in 653 or 654 at the Battle of Bulcamp<sup>42</sup> – fought against Penda of Mercia, and which also cost the life of his only son, Jurmin – signalled the end of the male line, it would have fallen to Seaxburh, the eldest daughter, to preserve the memory of her father's family. The proclamation as saints of the next generations of daughters and granddaughters could have been an attempt by Seaxburh to do just this, with the Frankish translation practices an ideal vehicle for maximising the public impact of the ceremonies. The attendance of many important ecclesiastical and lay figures of the time, the ritual opening of the coffin and the placing of the intact remains into a new and more accessible sarcophagus, and the reports of miraculous occurrences at the site of the shrine, all would have combined to provide what would have been a dramatic and memorable spectacle. If this indeed had been Seaxburh's intention, then it was a very clever and ultimately successful way of maintaining the legacy of her father's family, as the inclusion of accounts of all three women's translation ceremonies, and especially that of Æthelthryth, in Bede's eighth-century writing testifies. It was this account of Æthelthryth's translation that paved the way for her story to be

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<sup>40</sup> South Gyrwe was an area of Norfolk that was brought under Ana's control while he was king of East Anglia. These marriages and their political considerations are discussed by Barbara Yorke, see Barbara Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), pp. 70-71.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>42</sup> *HE*, Book 3, ch. 18, pp. 268-269.

disseminated to an extensive audience across a wide geographical area.

### **Bede's Æthelthryth: The First Hagiography**

Bede's *Martyrologium* contains an entry for Æthelthryth on her feast day, 23 June, which states simply 'St Æthelthryth, virgin and queen of Britain, whose body had been buried for eleven years, was found intact'.<sup>43</sup> Despite its brevity, this entry is important as it is one of the earliest datable textual references to Æthelthryth, referring to her as saint, virgin, and queen. The martyrology was compiled by Bede probably between 725 and 731, so only half a century after Æthelthryth's death and not much more than one generation after the translation of her remains by her sister.<sup>44</sup> According to Felice Lifshitz, Bede had been highly selective in his choice of who to include within the martyrology, omitting several saints to whom he referred in his later works,<sup>45</sup> and in fact only two English saints appear, St Alban and St Æthelthryth, whose feast days happen to occur on consecutive days. Æthelthryth's inclusion in Bede's *Martyrologium*, so soon after her death and translation, is an indication of the importance that Bede attributed to her story.

Indicative as it is in providing a signpost that knowledge of the cult of Æthelthryth had reached the Northumbrian church by the first half of the eighth century, the *Martyrologium* entry only runs to two lines. It provides no detail as to the saint's life or death other than the acknowledgement of her royal heritage, virginity, and the intactness of her remains some years after her interment, meaning that very little can be gleaned as to Bede's motives for her inclusion. However, the same cannot be said for what was arguably Bede's most important work, the *HE*. Compiled over a period of several years at a similar time to the *Martyrologium*

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<sup>43</sup> 'S. Ediltrudæ virginis et reginæ in Britannia: cujus corpus cum undecim annis esset sepultum, incorruptum inventum est', 'Martyrologium de Natalitiis Sanctorum', in J. A. Giles, ed., *The Complete Works of the Venerable Bede in the Original Latin* (London, 1843), p. 84. Translation author's own.

<sup>44</sup> Lifshitz, *Bede, Martyrology*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

and completed in 731, the text provides a comprehensive religious history of Britain from the first Roman incursions in 55 BC through to the time immediately prior to the work's completion. It contains within it two versions of Æthelthryth's *vita*, one prose and the other in verse; a narrative phenomenon that Bede himself called *opus geminatum*,<sup>46</sup> and a further indication of the importance Bede attributed to the life of the saint. The prose *Life* describes Æthelthryth's marriages, entry into the convent at Coldingham, the foundation of the monastery at Ely, her death and succession by her sister, and the opening of the tomb sixteen years later. Most of the narrative concentrates on the events that surrounded the discovery of Æthelthryth's intact remains and the healing *post mortem* of the tumour on her neck, before describing the translation of the body into the new sarcophagus which was placed in a more accessible position in the abbey.

Much like the *Martyrologium*, Bede made very considered choices as to who to include within the *HE*, and Æthelthryth is one of only seven Anglo-Saxon saints whose lives he narrated. She is in esteemed company, with Augustine, Aidan, Oswald, Chad, and Cuthbert her male counterparts, and Hild of Whitby the only other female saint whose story is related. The abbesses Æbbe of Coldingham and Æthelthryth's stepsister Æthelburh of Faremoûtier-en Brie are also mentioned in the *HE*, but with no other supporting detail or related accounts.<sup>47</sup> Anglo-Saxon female saints occur mostly in Book Four of the *HE*, and in fact Clare Lees and Gillian Overing refer to it as the 'Book of the Abbesses'.<sup>48</sup> Æthelthryth's inclusion in Bede's *HE* provides an indication of how significant he thought her life and example were, and the following six lines

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<sup>46</sup> Bede actually identifies this literary form within his *Ecclesiastical History*, see William Friesen, 'The Opus Geminatum and Anglo-Saxon Literature', *Neophilologus*, 95 (2011), p. 124.

<sup>47</sup> See *HE*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 392-393 and ch. 25, pp. 424-427 for references to Æbbe, and Book 3, ch. 8, pp. 173-176 for those to Æthelburh.

<sup>48</sup> Clare A Lees and Gillian R Overing, 'Birthing Bishops and Fathering Poets: Bede, Hild, and the Relations of Cultural Production', *Exemplaria*, 6 (1994), p. 61.

succinctly demonstrate what he saw as the most important traits of Æthelthryth when she was alive: queenship, monastic devotion, and chastity.

Nor lacks our age its Æthelthryth as well;  
Its virgin wonderful nor lacks our age.  
Of royal blood she sprang, but nobler far  
God's service found than pride of royal blood  
Proud she is, queening it on the earthly throne;  
In heaven established far more proud is she.<sup>49</sup>

The royal blood to which Bede refers was a result of both her parentage and her marriages, while her time in 'God's service' was spent initially at Coldingham Abbey in Northumbria before she travelled to Ely. She was believed to have died a virgin despite her two marriages, and her virginity was the quality that Bede most admired about her and was probably the principal reason that her story is included in the *HE*. The quotation above is taken from his poem, or as Bede calls it, 'a hymn on the subject of virginity', which is the second of the two chapters he dedicates to Æthelthryth and in which he compares her to the Virgin Mary as well as a number of other virginal martyrs.<sup>50</sup> Æthelthryth's virginity, devotion, and royal lineage were the three characteristics that in Bede's eyes defined her and which made her an ideal role model through whose example he could deliver a didactic message to the Northumbrian church.

Virginia Blanton has highlighted Bede's focus on the virginity of Æthelthryth, drawing a clear comparison between the saint and the Virgin Mary by saying that '[Bede] is most impressed by the queen's ability to retain her virginity, and the *vita* is designed to document her sexual

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<sup>49</sup> *'Nostra quoque egregia iam tempora uirgo beaut; Aedilthryda nitet nostra quoque egregia. Orta patre eximio, regali et stemmata clara, nobilior Domino est, orta patre eximio. Percepit inde decus reginae et scepra sub astris; plus super astra manens percipit inde decus.'* *HE*, Book 4, ch. 20, pp. 398-399.

<sup>50</sup> *'hymnum uirginitatis'*, *ibid.*, Book 4, ch. 20, pp. 396-399.



purity'.<sup>51</sup> That Bede was concentrating on the saint's virginity is hard to refute – it is stated overtly at the beginning of the verse life,<sup>52</sup> and she is referred to in the prose version as '*uirgo*' or '*uirginis*' no fewer than five times. Alongside her chastity, the saint's religious piety and frugal lifestyle are characteristics also highlighted by Bede. In the prose life, he emphasised Æthelthryth's habit of wearing only woollen garments, only washing with hot water on certain feast days, and eating only one meal a day.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, these humble traits are described in detail at the expense of her achievements and example as queen, monastic patron, and abbess. This is in direct contrast to Bede's description only three chapters later of the other female saint, Hild, whose nobility, ability to rule, and prudence are the qualities that particularly stand out from his narrative.<sup>54</sup>

The counterpoint between the portrayals of the two saints demonstrates the two different standpoints from which Bede was writing, one didactic and the other observational. Bede himself stated that he was working 'for my own benefit and that of my brothers',<sup>55</sup> which is indicative either of his immediate counterparts within the foundation at Wearmouth-Jarrow, or perhaps of the wider Northumbrian church. Nicholas Higham has looked in detail at the potential audiences for the *HE* and concludes that Bede's 'brothers' were in fact the Northumbrian religious hierarchy, whose education would have meant that they were well-versed in the Bible, music, and mathematics, and who were fluent in Latin.<sup>56</sup> These were the people who would have been able to determine the spiritual direction of the Anglo-Saxon

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<sup>51</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Bede introduced the verse life with the words 'It seems fitting to insert in this history a hymn on the subject of virginity which I composed many years ago in elegiac metre in honour of this queen and bride of Christ ...', '*Videtur oportunitum huic historiae etiam hymnum uirginitatis inserere, quem ante annos plurimos in laudem ac praeconium eiusdem reginae ac sponse Christi ...*', see *HE*, Book 4, ch. 20, pp. 396-397.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 392-393.

<sup>54</sup> See *ibid.*, Book 4, ch. 23, pp. 404-415 for Bede's account of the life of Hild.

<sup>55</sup> '*sanctam meae meorumque*', *ibid.*, Book 5, autobiographical note following ch. 24, pp. 566-567.

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas J Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context* (London, 2006), p. 41. Higham later describes them as 'middle-aged or elderly men of high or comparatively high rank within the religious hierarchy', *ibid.*, p. 44.

church in Northumbria, and it follows therefore that Bede was providing them with his view of the behaviours and tenets that he felt were necessary to ensure an earlier monastic tradition was upheld. Æthelthryth's life was the exemplar of these behaviours, and the emphasis Bede placed on them is clear throughout his narrative, and especially within his poetic discourse in praise of her virginity. Chastity and virginity were traits held in the highest regard, and so Æthelthryth's successful preservation of this state throughout her entire life, despite being married twice, meant that she could be portrayed as a model of the behaviours that the religious community should be emulating as they built their foundations. Bede was also sending a message to the wider Anglo-Saxon church, which in his eyes was an institution increasingly pervaded by greed and patronage to the king and the aristocracy which went completely against the monastic culture that he espoused.<sup>57</sup> In complete contrast to this behaviour, Æthelthryth had refuted her royal life and set up a new monastery, housing both monks and nuns, while receiving no favours from the king. This portrayal of Æthelthryth was a direct challenge to what Bede saw as the status-conscious aristocracy that was infiltrating the church.

But Bede's style of writing was also in parts more historical than hagiographical, with his narrative of the life and death of Hild one such example. This account was written mostly as a straightforward series of events, detailing firstly her secular life as the daughter of a relative of the king, and then latterly as nun and abbess, the time from which her leadership and wisdom are celebrated by Bede.<sup>58</sup> His prose life of Æthelthryth does also contain elements of Bede the historian as distinct from Bede the hagiographer. At several points in the text, he refers to figures who were present at the events he was narrating, using their credentials as reliable

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<sup>57</sup> In a letter to Bishop Ecgberht of York, Bede writes in 734 that: 'Under the pretext of founding minsters, they [i.e. the leaders of the church at the time] give money to kings and buy territories for themselves in which they can freely indulge their lust. Furthermore, they get hereditary right over these lands ascribed to themselves in royal edicts, and have these documents of their privileges confirmed by the subscriptions of bishops, abbots and great men of the world, as though they were really worthy of God', 'Bede's *Epistola Ad Ecgbertum Episcopum*', in Charles C Plummer, ed., *Bede's Epistola ad Ecgbertum Episcopum* (Oxford, 1896), vol. 1, p. 415.

<sup>58</sup> *HE*, Book 4, ch. 23, pp. 406-407.

witnesses to add credibility to his account. Prior to her entry into the monastery at Coldingham, Æthelthryth had been married to her second husband Ecgrith for twelve years, and Bede refuted the understandable scepticism that would have surrounded the claim of her virginity, saying that ‘When I asked Bishop Wilfrid of blessed memory whether this was true, because certain people doubted it, he told me that he had the most perfect proof of her virginity.’<sup>59</sup> Bede employed a similar mechanism in his account of the opening of her tomb sixteen years after her death, whereupon a scar on her neck was discovered, the only remnant of a tumour that had apparently healed while she was interred. She had died, probably of plague, in 679, and in the days prior to her death the tumour had been lanced by the surgeon Cynefrith. On the occasion of the translation of her relics, Bede stated that Cynefrith was present when the tomb was opened, and he recorded the surgeon as saying at the time:

I saw the body of God’s holy virgin raised from the tomb and laid on a bed like one asleep. They drew back the cloth which covered her face and showed me the wound I had made by my incision, now healed, so that instead of the open gaping wound which she had when she was buried, there now appeared, marvellous to relate, only the slightest traces of a scar.<sup>60</sup>

The key point here is that Bede was quoting Cynefrith who had recognised the miraculous intervention that had enabled the tumour to heal *post mortem*, and so he (Bede) was portraying himself as an independent observer and recorder of the events. Bede was adding authenticity to his claim of Æthelthryth’s purity and sanctity, and in this way and distinct from the didactic

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<sup>59</sup> ‘*sicut mihi met sciscitanti, cum hoc an ita esset quibusdam uenisset in dubium, beatae memoriae Uilfrid episcopus referebat, dicens se testem integritatis eius esse certissimum*’, *ibid.*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 390-393.

<sup>60</sup> ‘*Nec multo post clamauerunt me intus, reserato ostio papilionis, uidique eleuatam de tumulo et positum in lectulo corpus sacrae Deo uirginis quasi dormientis simile. Sed et discooperto uultus indumento monstraerunt mihi etiam uulnus incisurae, quod feceram, curatum, ita ut mirum in modum pro aperto et hiante uulnere, cum quo sepulta erat, tenuissima tunc cicatricis uestigia parerent*’, *ibid.*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 394-395.

tone discussed above, he was presenting himself as a credible historian, which in his eyes was an important reputational consideration.<sup>61</sup>

The naming of an authoritative figure who was able to affirm the veracity of what was being recounted became a more common mechanism within Anglo-Saxon hagiographical accounts written subsequent to the *HE*,<sup>62</sup> but in the early part of the eighth century, saints' life stories were a relatively recent introduction. Bede therefore selected his witnesses with the same degree of care he applied to his choices of subjects for his narratives. In his *Life of Æthelthryth* Bede refers to the accounts of Wilfrid and Cynefrith, both credible figures in the Northumbrian church of the time, and both of whom were known to Æthelthryth. Wilfrid had been appointed Bishop of Northumbria in 665 after successfully persuading the Celtic church to adopt the Roman calculation for the date of Easter at the Synod of Whitby a year earlier,<sup>63</sup> but was expelled by Ecgrith, Æthelthryth's second husband, in 677 or 678.<sup>64</sup> Prior to his expulsion, however, and what was probably a factor in Ecgrith's decision to expel him, Wilfrid had been given a piece of land by Æthelthryth upon which he founded Hexham Abbey,<sup>65</sup> and had later officiated in her ordination into Coldingham Abbey.<sup>66</sup> So Wilfrid had been a long-standing advocate of Æthelthryth's, and had been present at all of the key moments in her religious life – her acceptance into the monastic community at Coldingham, her death, and her translation. But he was also well-known to Bede, and it is likely that they met on a number of occasions. We know from the *HE* that Bede consulted Wilfrid on the question of Æthelthryth's virginity, and the tone of Bede's enquiry regarding a subject that was of such a delicate nature suggests that

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<sup>61</sup> William McCready asserts that Bede was particularly concerned about providing a truthful narrative, William D McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede* (Toronto, 1994), p. 232.

<sup>62</sup> Gail I Berlin, 'Bede's Miracle Stories: Notions of Evidence and Authority in Old English History', *Neophilologus*, 74 (1990), p. 440.

<sup>63</sup> Bertram Colgrave, ed., *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge, 1985), chs. X and XI, pp. 20-24.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. XXIV, pp. 48-50.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. XXII, pp. 44-47.

<sup>66</sup> *HE*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 392-393.

this was not the first time the two men had been in contact.<sup>67</sup> Although Bede's and Æthelthryth's lives briefly overlapped – Bede was born in 672, seven years before Æthelthryth's death – the details of her life would have had to have been passed on to him by a third party. The evidence strongly suggests that Wilfrid was the link connecting Bede and Æthelthryth. Bede had probably used Stephen of Ripon's *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, written around 720, so very soon after the bishop's death in 709, as a source for the *HE*.<sup>68</sup> Stephen's narrative is actually the earliest known text to include references to Æthelthryth,<sup>69</sup> although the level of detail that Bede included about Æthelthryth's story was far greater than that available in Stephen's text. It is therefore probable that the story of the Ely saint was recounted first-hand by Wilfrid himself, and that it made enough of an impression on Bede that he not only used her as a role model in his commentary to the Northumbrian church, but also composed and incorporated the poetic celebration of her virginity.

Cynefrith is a much less well-known figure than Wilfrid, with Bede's narrative of the treatment of Æthelthryth the only known reference to him. However, his inclusion in the *HE* is significant given Bede's assertion that he was present both prior to and at the time of Æthelthryth's death, as well as being one of the witnesses of her translation.<sup>70</sup> Bede refers to him as a 'physician', the earliest existing textual reference to anyone identified as such,<sup>71</sup> and there is evidence that suggests this was a position that was held in high regard in Anglo-Saxon society, due to the education and knowledge physician/surgeons received and the level of responsibility they

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<sup>67</sup> Christopher Grocock has examined the itineraries of both Bede and Wilfrid, and suggests several possible occasions when their paths could have crossed, Grocock, *Wilfrid, Benedict Biscop, and Bede*, pp. 96-99, while Higham asserts that they knew each other personally and had visited each other's foundations in the period 706-710, Nicholas J Higham, 'Wilfrid and Bede's Historia', in *ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>68</sup> See Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>69</sup> See Colgrave, ed., *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, chs. XIX and XXII, pp. 40-42 and 44-47.

<sup>70</sup> *HE*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 394-395.

<sup>71</sup> 'medicus', *ibid.*, Book 4, ch. 19, p. 395. Norman Moore refers to Cynefrith as 'the first physician who appears in English history', Norman Moore, *The Physician in English History* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 9.

held.<sup>72</sup> Consequently Cynefrith was more than suitable as an authoritative witness with whom Bede could have corroborated the miraculous healing of Æthelthryth's tumour while she was in the tomb.

Æthelthryth's spirituality, virginity, and sanctity were presented in the *HE* by Bede both as historical facts and as behavioural exemplars, authenticated by two credible and reputed witnesses in Wilfrid and Cynefrith. The balance of evidence suggests that the intervention of this triumvirate of influential Anglo-Saxon churchmen was the difference between Æthelthryth's story being confined to a few brief mentions in the hagiographies of other contemporary saints, such as her appearance in the *vita* of Wilfrid himself, or becoming one of the small number whose narratives would endure and be widely distributed throughout England.

### **Evidence of Æthelthryth in Francia**

Despite the brevity of the entry for Æthelthryth and the absence of detail surrounding her life, Bede's *Martyrologium* can be shown to have been responsible for the transmission of her story beyond the borders of East Anglia and Northumbria, and into the near-Continent. His martyrology has been recognised as an attempt to move away from simple lists of saints, instead providing brief descriptions of them in chronological order.<sup>73</sup> The use of martyrologies is linked with ecclesiastical calendars which listed the saint and their feast day, and from which religious institutions would have been able to identify the saint to be commemorated, referring then to a compendium of saints lives from where their story would have been recited. The use of religious calendars became more and more widespread, and they later became incorporated into prayer books, breviaries (which were liturgical service books containing details of all of the

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<sup>72</sup> Details of an Anglo-Saxon physician's responsibilities and training were outlined by Stanley Rubin, see Stanley Rubin, 'The Medical Practitioner in Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 20 (1970).

<sup>73</sup> Lifshitz, *Bede, Martyrology*, p. 171.

psalms, readings, and lessons to be recited on any particular day), and psalters, usually located within the first few folios. The inclusion of a particular saint on their feast day in an institution's calendar was indicative that their life was celebrated in some way, usually through the reading of some or all of their hagiography.

Work by Francis Wormald on pre-1100 ecclesiastical calendars uncovered an entry from an exceedingly early calendar that was held in the Munich Staatsarchiv until 1939, subsequent to which its whereabouts become unclear.<sup>74</sup> Luckily, however, it was the subject of a considerable amount of scholarly analysis prior to its loss with several detailed photographs of the folio being taken, meaning that study of it continued throughout the twentieth century. It survived as a fragment of one leaf, containing the calendar entries for 3 - 20 May on one side and 4 - 24 June on the other, and includes an entry for the anniversary of the date of Æthelthryth's death on 23 June. The calendar has been dated to the eighth century, based on the style of the script,<sup>75</sup> and more narrowly to between 721 and 755 by Bernard Bischoff through identification of the saints included in the calendar, although due to the fragmentary nature of the manuscript and thus the small number of saints contained within it, this date range is more speculative.<sup>76</sup> Mechthild Gretsch has derived a date range for just the surviving fragment of between 725 and 754, based on the entries for King Osric of Northumbria, who died in 729, and whose entry is the latest in the original hand on the manuscript, and that of St Boniface, who was martyred in 754, and whose entry is the earliest identifiable amendment to the document in a different hand.<sup>77</sup> Its most probable origin has been identified as being somewhere in Northumbria, again as a result of the saints whose feast-days were being commemorated (Osric being one), and Bischoff

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<sup>74</sup> See Francis Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars Before A.D. 1100* (London, 1934). The manuscript fragment is catalogued as Munich Staatsarchiv, MS 108.

<sup>75</sup> Rebecca Rushforth, *Saints in English Kalendars Before A.D. 1100* (London, 2008), pp. 21-22.

<sup>76</sup> See Bernard Bischoff, *Die Südostdeutschen Schreibschulen und Bibliotheken in der Karolingerzeit: Die Bayrischen Diözesen* (Wiesbaden, 1974), p. 167.

<sup>77</sup> Mechthild Gretsch, 'Æthelthryth of Ely in a Lost Calendar from Munich', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 35 (2006), p. 160.

describes the hand as 'Northumbrian majuscule'.<sup>78</sup> Further annotations on the manuscript mean that its ninth- and early tenth-century provenance has been positively identified to the monasteries of either Tegernsee or Immünster, in the diocese of Freising in Bavaria.<sup>79</sup>

The significance of the appearance of Æthelthryth's name in the Munich calendar cannot be overemphasised. By the middle of the eighth century, so only two generations after her death and within living memory of the first translation of her relics, the only texts known to have existed at the time that mentioned Æthelthryth were Bede's *Martyrologium*, completed between 725 and 731,<sup>80</sup> and a Latin precursor to the *Old English Martyrologium*, which has been dated to between 731 and 740 and attributed to Acca of Hexham.<sup>81</sup> Both of these compendia were of Northumbrian origin, and, as sources of the Munich calendar, would explain the presence within it of saints with Northumbrian links, and hence the assertion that the calendar itself also originated from there. The question remains, however, as to the date at which the manuscript was transferred from England to the Continent. Gretsch favours an earlier date, suggesting that the calendar was in fact compiled specifically for St Boniface's final mission to Frisia in 754, and points to the Germanic form of Æthelthryth's name that appears in the manuscript – the 23 June entry refers to her as 'Aethildrudis' – as evidence for this.<sup>82</sup>

The assertion that the Munich calendar entry is the earliest evidence there is of Æthelthryth's presence on the Continent is reinforced through manuscript analysis of contemporary

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<sup>78</sup> Elias A Lowe, ed., *Codices Latini Antiquiores - A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century, Part IX, Germany: Maria Laach – Würzburg* (Oxford, 1959), p. 3; Bischoff, *Die Südostdeutschen Schreibschulen und Bibliotheken*, p. 167.

<sup>79</sup> Lowe, ed., *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> See Henri Quentin, *Les Martyrologes Historiques du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1908), p. 106, for the transcription of the entry for Æthelthryth.

<sup>81</sup> The *Old English Martyrologium* has been dated to between 800 and 900 (see Christine Rauer, ed., *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 3, for the discussion around the dating of the OEM, and *ibid.*, pp. 122-123 for the entry concerning Æthelthryth), although Michael Lapidge has argued that a Latin *Vorlage* predates the Old English version, see Michael Lapidge, 'Acca of Hexham and the Origin of the *Old English Martyrology*', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 123 (2005), p. 69.

<sup>82</sup> Gretsch has analysed the spelling and etymology of the saint's name in her article on the calendar, see Gretsch, 'Æthelthryth of Ely in a Lost Calendar from Munich', pp. 170-172.



martyrologies. While entries for her in Bede's *Martyrologium* and the *Old English Martyrologium* show that knowledge of her already existed in England in the 730s and 740s, she does not appear in martyrologies originating on the Continent until a century later. Neither the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* nor the Calendar of Willibrord, both of which have copies that date from the early eighth century, contain any reference to her, despite them having strong Northumbrian connections.<sup>83</sup> The *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* was revised in the late seventh and early eighth centuries to incorporate a number of Northumbrian saints' names into the thousands it already contained,<sup>84</sup> while Willibrord (b. 658, d. 754) himself was born and raised in Northumbria. He was an Anglo-Saxon missionary to Frisia, a predecessor of Boniface, and had already been on the Continent for almost forty years by the time Bede compiled his *Martyrologium*, and so any occurrence of Æthelthryth's name in the calendar would have had to have originated from another source.<sup>85</sup> Had knowledge of her cult been more widespread by the time either of these martyrologies was being compiled, Æthelthryth's links to Northumbria through her marriage to the Northumbrian king Ecgrith and her subsequent stay at the monastery in Coldingham would have merited her inclusion within them. Instead, it was not until Bede wrote of her in his *Martyrologium* and *HE* that dissemination of her story to a wider audience became a reality, and her appearance in Usuard's *Martyrologium* is testament to this. Usuard (d. c. 875) was a monk of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and wrote his martyrology sometime in the decade after 850. The entry for Æthelthryth for 23 June reads 'In Britain, the holy virgin

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<sup>83</sup> The *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, or Martyrology of Jerome, originated in northern Italy in the later fifth century, although the earliest extant examples are those that are likely to have been amended and updated in Northumbria sometime after 700, see *ibid.*, pp. 161-162, and Felice Lifshitz, *The Name of the Saint: The Martyrology of Jerome and Access to the Sacred in Francia, 627-827* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 2006), pp. 143-144. The Calendar of Willibrord is an early eighth century compilation of saints that is representative of the areas with associations to Willibrord, such as Northumbria, Kent, Ireland, Rome, and Gaul, see Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), p. 65.

<sup>84</sup> Lifshitz in fact states that there are 'tens of thousands of geographically disparate names.' Lifshitz, *The Name of the Saint*, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> A marginal entry in an early-eighth century version of the calendar has been attributed to Willibrord himself (it is signed '*Clemens Willibrordus*'), and is dated 728, by which time the missionary was in Echternach, in what is now Luxembourg, see Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*, p. 65.

Ediltrudis, whose body had been buried for eleven years, was found intact'.<sup>86</sup> The Germanic spelling of the saint's name is noteworthy here, similar to the Munich document of a century earlier, and suggests that her inclusion was intended for a continental audience. Robert Bartlett has pointed to the use of Bede's works as some of Usuard's principal sources,<sup>87</sup> and the likelihood is that this was the case for the entry relating to Æthelthryth, a claim strengthened by Usuard's statement that Æthelthryth had been buried for eleven years, the same timespan as in Bede's martyrology. All subsequent accounts of her life, including Bede's *HE*, defined the period of interment prior to her translation as sixteen years, compelling evidence that Usuard's source was Bede's martyrology. Usuard's *Martyrologium* is the first evidence we have of a more widespread recognition of the saint's importance outside of England, however. The Munich calendar was probably not widely distributed, being written specifically for the monks of Iimmünster or Tegernsee, whereas a number of copies of Usuard's *Martyrologium* are known about and were a mechanism for the introduction of Bedan writing to the Continent.

Despite the Munich calendar being the only extant example of an eighth century continental calendar, it is unlikely that it was unique at the time, and the chances are that Æthelthryth would have appeared in a number of them, principally through the use of Bede's writing as a source for their collation. However, the existence of the Munich calendar, its defined date range, and the inclusion of an entry for St Boniface do allow for a great deal more insight to be obtained. One conclusion that could be drawn from its existence, its continental provenance, and the presence of a commemorative entry for Æthelthryth within it, is that her qualities of chastity, humility, and piety, which were so admired by Bede, were seen to be of such importance that her example was used by Boniface in his mission to convert the Frisians to Christianity. There is no direct proof that her cult was successfully introduced onto the

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<sup>86</sup> 'In Britannia, natalis sanctae Ediltrudis virginis, cuius corpus, cum undecim annis esset sepultum, incorruptum inventum est', Jacques Dubois, ed., *Le Martyrologe d'Usuard: Texte et Commentaire* (Brussels, 1965), p. 253.

<sup>87</sup> Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?*, p. 49.

Continent, as there is no evidence of pilgrimage taking place between there and Ely, and no continental church dedications relating to her have as yet been identified. However, a wider consideration of the spread of Christianity into the Frankish Empire in the Anglo-Saxon period reveals compelling details that suggest Æthelthryth would have been an ideal choice of saint with which to disseminate the missionaries' message.

Willibrord and Boniface were the earliest of a number of Anglo-Saxon missionaries who journeyed to Europe in the eighth century. Thomas Noble and Thomas Head have edited a volume of translations of the *Lives* of no less than five of these who were active on the Continent at this time, the other three being Willibald of Essex (d. 786), Leoba of Wessex (d. 780), and Willihad of Northumbria (d. 789),<sup>88</sup> and they provide details that add weight to the premise that Æthelthryth could have been one of the saintly examples they used in their teaching. Of the five missionaries, Boniface is the one of whom most is known, as his *Life* is a contemporary one, written by Willibald not long after Boniface's death in 754. Boniface was also a prolific letter-writer and many of his letters still exist, providing first-hand insight into his life and preaching. In several of these, he is seen to request books to be sent to him from England, and in two instances specifically asks for several of Bede's works to be despatched, proof that he was trying to stay informed of the latest writing to come from his homeland.<sup>89</sup> Accompanying the religious volumes from England to Germany was, according to Willibald, 'an exceedingly large number of holy men ... among them readers, writers, and learned men trained in the other arts'.<sup>90</sup> These specific examples are evidence that there was a constant flow of

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas F X Noble and Thomas Head, 'Introduction', in T. F. X. Noble and T. Head, eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), p. xxxv.

<sup>89</sup> In Letter XXII (dating from 735-736), Boniface thanks the abbess Eadburga for her gift of 'sacred books', while in Letter LI (742-746), he writes to Bishop Daniel of Winchester asking for a manuscript in which 'the six Prophets are contained in one volume in clear letters written in full'. Letters LX (746-747) and LXXV (747-751) contain requests first to Abbot Huetbert of Wearmouth and then to Archbishop Egbert of York for the works of Bede, who Boniface describes as an 'inspired priest and student of the Sacred Scriptures'. See Ephraim Emerton, ed., *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York, 1940), pp. 60-61 (Letter XXII), p. 116 (Letter LI), p. 134 (Letter LX), and p. 168 (Letter LXXV).

<sup>90</sup> 'The Life of Saint Boniface', in T. F. X. Noble and T. Head, eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), p. 128.

knowledge and learning to the Continent at the time Boniface and the other English missionaries were there, and there was in all likelihood much more happening than is known about from the extant sources. Joanna Story points to the codicological evidence, highlighting the Anglo-Saxon script, punctuation, and spelling found in a number of eighth- and ninth-century manuscripts, and identifying York and Northumbria in particular as the areas where the links to Francia were first made and subsequently developed.<sup>91</sup>

Despite Æthelthryth's appearance in only two Continental documentary sources of the eighth and ninth centuries (the Munich calendar and Usuard's *Martyrologium*), there is a weight of circumstantial evidence that strengthens the case for her story and example to have been used by the reforming missionaries of the time in their quest to spread Christianity into the Frankish kingdom. Northumbria features heavily, with Bedan writing forming the basis of a number of the liturgical and didactic texts that were being taken across to Europe, while Willibrord, Boniface, and Willibald all had Northumbrian connections, and Æthelthryth's own links with this part of Anglo-Saxon England have been described above. Æthelthryth's story and her characteristics of virginity, piety, and patronage were completely complementary to the missionaries' message and their goal of converting the Frankish people to Christianity. While she would never compare with the apostolic saints such as Peter and Paul in terms of influence and renown, she was however a very good role model with which to demonstrate the benefits of a Christian way of life.

What has become apparent from the early calendrical evidence is the introduction of her cult and her story into continental Europe in the eighth and ninth centuries. Æthelthryth's inclusion in martyrologies and other texts by Bede at a time when Northumbrian missionaries were journeying into Francia meant that she could be used as an almost-contemporary role model for

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<sup>91</sup> Joanna Story, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750-870* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 2-3 and p. 50.

them to use to demonstrate their version of Christianity to the pagans they were trying to convert. Her status as an internationally recognised saint is not evident within either her hagiographies or the historiography relating to her, and therefore shows the value of investigating under-utilised sources such as ecclesiastical calendars, something that until now has rarely been undertaken in any depth.

## Conclusion

Bede's *HE* is the first truly hagiographical work that tells the story of Æthelthryth of Ely, and its collation within a half-century of the saint's death and translation point to a character whose life and miracles were considered to be of great importance to Bede as he considered who to include. His use of corroborative witnesses to back up his narrative, and especially concerning what were very probably contentious issues that were open to wide-ranging scepticism – such as the reports of Æthelthryth's virginity after two husbands and a total of nearly fifteen years of marriage – shows that he was very aware of the importance of historical accuracy within his work. His choices of Wilfrid, a well-known, successful, and authoritative figure within the church, and an advocate of Æthelthryth's, and Cynefrith, the nun's surgeon and himself someone who held an esteemed position within society, were made specifically because of their standing and their intimate knowledge of Æthelthryth's life. In this way, Bede was able to recount the miraculous events that occurred at her translation in a historically verifiable way while still maintaining the narrative style of the hagiographer.

Although the *HE* was the work that enabled knowledge of Æthelthryth to be disseminated across the country, it appears that his *Martyrologium* was instrumental in introducing her story to the Continent. The fragment of the ecclesiastical calendar from Munich provides a tantalising link to the Northumbrian missionaries to Francia of the eighth century, whose itinerant work could have been the vehicle through which Æthelthryth's narrative reached a continental

audience. The possibility that this occurred so short a time after Bede had recognised the important part Æthelthryth was to play within his missive to the Northumbrian church is testament to both the power behind the story of Æthelthryth's translation and the reputation of Bede himself. It is only through the combination of both these elements that Æthelthryth's cult was ultimately able to survive beyond the Viking incursions of the ninth and tenth centuries.

While Bede's historical text has allowed us to understand the early expansion and ultimately the survival of Æthelthryth's cult beyond the tenth century, the findings of archaeological excavation coupled with church dedications has provided evidence of locations connected with Æthelthryth dating from the time of her journey from Coldingham to Ely, so a few years prior to her death. Despite the fact that the earliest account of a miracle being performed at any of these sites is from the twelfth century, the significance of the locations themselves is not diminished. All three are in important places, with two of them, West Halton and Hyssington, lying on the home, i.e. Mercian, side of rivers that were also territorial boundaries that Æthelthryth or her father had crossed over into relative safety, while Stow Green was also a place of sanctuary on Æthelthryth's journey towards Ely. Churches being founded at these locations were tangible reminders of the importance of the events that had taken place there and of Æthelthryth's involvement with them. While there is no direct evidence to suggest that cult activity relating to Æthelthryth was taking place in the years leading up to her death, it is entirely conceivable that the churches themselves would have emphasised their links with her once they were established, and especially once the story of her miraculous translation had spread outwards from Ely. This activity, then, would constitute the earliest signs that Æthelthryth was well-known enough for her name or story to be used to generate interest in a religious site outside Ely.

The foundation of churches in these three locations away from Ely would not have been enough in themselves to guarantee the continued success of any newly-established cult of Æthelthryth,

and its failure would have also meant that any legacy for which King Ana of East Anglia would have wished to be remembered would have also been erased. The deaths of both King Ana and his son at the Battle of Bulcamp had wiped out the male line, thus rendering impossible the continuation of the king's legacy through childbirth. In the absence of direct descendants, Ana's eldest daughter, Seaxburh, appears to have attempted to preserve the memory of the East Anglian royal family through the declaration of sainthood for the next two generations of female offspring. The translations of the remains of Ana's daughter and granddaughter at Faremoûtier-en-Brie within a decade of his death were accompanied by ceremonies that would have involved large numbers of people, records of miraculous happenings as the coffins were opened, and the re-siting of the tombs to much more accessible and visible positions within the abbey. It appears that the practices Seaxburh had witnessed, or perhaps even helped organise, at Faremoûtier were subsequently imported across to England and replicated at the translation of another sister of hers, Æthelthryth, in 695. This translation was the earliest recorded in England to use the same elements present in the ceremonies undertaken on the Continent and could be interpreted as part of an attempt to retain the importance of the lineage and legacy of King Ana.

The success of any attempted strategy to secure the continuation of the legacy of King Ana is debatable, with Christine Fell calling the existence of at least one of the 'saintly sisters' a 'figment of a tenth-century imagination'.<sup>92</sup> She has also cast doubts on the success, or even survival, of the cult of Æthelthryth beyond the end of the ninth century, intimating that it was already waning prior to the Viking raids, and that reports that the foundation at Ely was the victim of Danish aggression would have made 'better copy than one whose existence simply petered out'.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, the historical accuracy of Bede's account of Æthelthryth's life has been

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<sup>92</sup> Christine Fell has also questioned the existence of two further sisters, Eormenhild and Wærburh, based on the lack of calendrical evidence of their lives, see Christine Fell, 'Saint Æðelþryð: A Historical-Hagiographical Dichotomy Revisited', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 38 (1994), pp. 33-34.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

called into question, with Pauline Thompson suggesting that his description of her sanctity was no more than idealistic fantasy on his part.<sup>94</sup> The questions as to whether Æthelthryth had in fact remained a virgin and escaped to Ely from Coldingham, or whether she had lived her monastic life in exactly the austere and humble manner in which Bede described it, or indeed whether the tumour on her neck had healed *post mortem* are, to a certain extent, moot. The churches that were established in her name, the description of the translation of her remains by her sister, and the narratives that were written about her in the *HE* and in the early martyrologies were all in some respect manipulative in their nature. They were all formulated in order to perform a particular function, whether to attract visitors to an abbey, to help ensure the longevity of a dynasty, or to provide a role model to be emulated by the Anglo-Saxon church. The combined effect of these individual actions meant that the cult of Æthelthryth was established and then survived, and ultimately thrived, into the tenth century and beyond. It was, however, only through the constant utilisation and manipulation of Æthelthryth's story and character, a narrative trend that was started, probably more for didactic reasons than idealistic ones, by Bede, that the longevity of her cult was secured. The events of the two hundred years described here signified the start of what was to become a symbiotic relationship between those who wished to harness the influence of Ely's saint for their own reasons, and the Ely community reliant on others to spread knowledge of her power in order to ensure the continued success of their foundation.

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<sup>94</sup> See Pauline A Thompson, 'St Æthelthryth: The Making of History from Hagiography', in M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler, eds., *Studies in English Literature: 'Doubt Wisely', Papers in Honour of E G Stanley* (London, 1996), p. 476.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **866 TO 1066 – INVASION, STAGNATION, RE-FOUNDATION, CONSOLIDATION**

Ely's fate at the hands of the Danish invaders in 866 is recorded in the *LE* in stark detail.<sup>1</sup> The monastery's nuns were killed, the monastery itself was torched, and its ornaments and relics were plundered. However, against this backdrop of destruction, the shrine of Æthelthryth remained virtually intact. A Viking invader who attempted to break open the tomb with his axe was instantly blinded and survived only long enough for his compatriots to see the consequences of his actions.<sup>2</sup> This event marked a key moment in Ely's history and the portrayal of its saint, since the Viking's attempt to break into the tomb and Æthelthryth's immediate and uncompromising response would set the scene for how her character was portrayed and utilised over the next two hundred years.

Æthelthryth's punishment of the Norse raider constituted the first recorded miracle since her tomb had been opened and her remains translated by her sister Seaxburh nearly two centuries earlier, and thus signified a fundamental change in the nature of the relationship between saint and monastery. The Æthelthryth of Bede's *HE* from the early eighth century, the passive epitome of humility and chastity and a role model to the Anglo-Saxon religious community,<sup>3</sup> had transformed into an actively vengeful figure who was fiercely protective of Ely's inhabitants and of the inviolability of her shrine. The addition of this dimension to her character was to play a vital role in the fortunes of the monastery at Ely over the next two centuries as the foundation slowly emerged from the state of stagnation which had been the legacy of the Viking raids. The monastery's pace of growth gradually accelerated throughout the latter half of the tenth

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<sup>1</sup> *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 40, pp. 54-55.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. 41, pp. 55-56.

<sup>3</sup> See *HE*, Book 4, chs. 19 and 20, pp. 391-401.

century, culminating in its re-foundation in 970 which resulted in a period of relative stability and prosperity that was only brought to an end by the Norman Conquest. These three distinct phases of Ely's development subsequent to the Viking invasion – stagnation, re-foundation, and consolidation – are discussed and analysed here through the lens of the saint's, and through her the foundation's, influence. Textual sources have been augmented with records of Ely's land acquisitions, church dedications, and latterly the saint's appearances in English ecclesiastical calendars and litanies, and these together provide a much fuller picture of how Ely's fortunes were intrinsically linked to the portrayal of Æthelthryth and the promotion of her cult during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries.

The pivotal episode within this two-hundred-year period was the re-foundation of the monastery at Ely by Bishop Æthelwold in 970, but the evidence suggests that the seeds of reform were being sown prior to this date. The combination of a set of land transactions and a small, self-contained collection of miracles reveals that Ely was already being prepared for the introduction of the Rule of St Benedict from as early as 950. Therefore, while the declaration of Ely as a Benedictine foundation was obviously the focal point, the reality was that the reform of the monastery took place over a number of years. This is consistent with the theories surrounding reform put forward by Steven Vanderputten, who states that 'rather than looking at reforms as 'flashpoint' events, we should be looking at them in relation to processes taking place before and after the first arrival of the reformers but also as processes themselves'.<sup>4</sup>

Viewing the reform of Ely as a longitudinal process means the symbiotic relationship mentioned earlier between saint and bishop becomes increasingly evident. On the one hand, the success of Æthelwold's reforms was dependent upon him being able to utilise Æthelthryth as an example through which the behaviours he wished to engender could be demonstrated, while on

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<sup>4</sup> Steven Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process: Realities and Representations in Medieval Flanders 900-1100* (Ithaca, New York, 2017), p. 9.

the other the cult of the saint could be promoted and publicised far more widely by an influential and wealthy patron. These joint aims can be seen to have been achieved in two ways. First, a strategy of land acquisition that was initiated prior to the abbey's re-foundation ultimately resulted in the Ely monastery becoming one of the largest landowners of East Anglia by 1066. It was greatly accelerated during the latter part of the reign of King Edgar (died 975) and continued throughout those of Edward the Martyr (reigned 975 to 978) and Æthelred II (reigned 978 to 1016). Second, Æthelwold introduced a textual tradition that enabled the message of Æthelthryth as a role model, and the potential consequences if her example was not followed, to be disseminated to the inhabitants of the monasteries and the laity alike. This was an approach that had not been evident since the writing of Bede's eighth-century hagiographical account of Æthelthryth's life. However, by the second half of the eleventh century the saint's presence could be seen in the calendars and litanies of mainly Benedictine foundations across the south, east, and the Midlands of England, the literary roots of which can be traced back to Æthelwold's Winchester scriptorium. Despite several legal challenges and land disputes, the handling of which by Æthelwold provides an insight into the bishop's character and business acumen, the foundation remained stable and its influence continued to grow right up until the Norman Conquest.

### **The Aftermath of the Viking Raids and the Initial Seeds of Reform**

In 870 Ely held land in only a handful of locations in Cambridgeshire, and the two parish churches of West Halton and Stow Green in Lincolnshire were the only ones with links to Æthelthryth, reflecting the places where she had founded churches during her journey from Coldingham to Ely in the late seventh century. The map below, Figure 4, shows these, as well as the site of Æthelthryth's violent retribution against the Norse invader who tried to break into her tomb.



Figure 4. The Extent of Ely's Influence in 870.

Nearly a century later, and a short time prior to the re-foundation of the abbey, Ely had slightly increased its landholding through endowments of land in the south of Cambridgeshire and in Essex (as shown in Figure 5, below). The *LE* describes how a widow named Æscwyn had donated land at Stonea to Wulfstan of Dalham, an advisor to both King Eadred and his nephew King Edgar, who had immediately pledged it to Æthelthryth at Ely.<sup>5</sup> The pledge of this land is significant for three reasons: It was the first example of land being acquired by the Ely

<sup>5</sup> *LE*(B), Book II, ch. 18, pp. 93-94.

foundation, marking the beginning of the expansion of the abbey's landholding that was to continue for the next half-century; the recipient of the land was named in the charter as St Æthelthryth herself, and not the abbot or the community of Ely, which immediately recognised her as the land's custodian and protector; and it was the first instance recording the involvement of Wulfstan of Dalham, someone who was already a significant figure in the political landscape of Anglo-Saxon Ely and East Anglia, and who was to play a key role in the reform of the monastery itself.

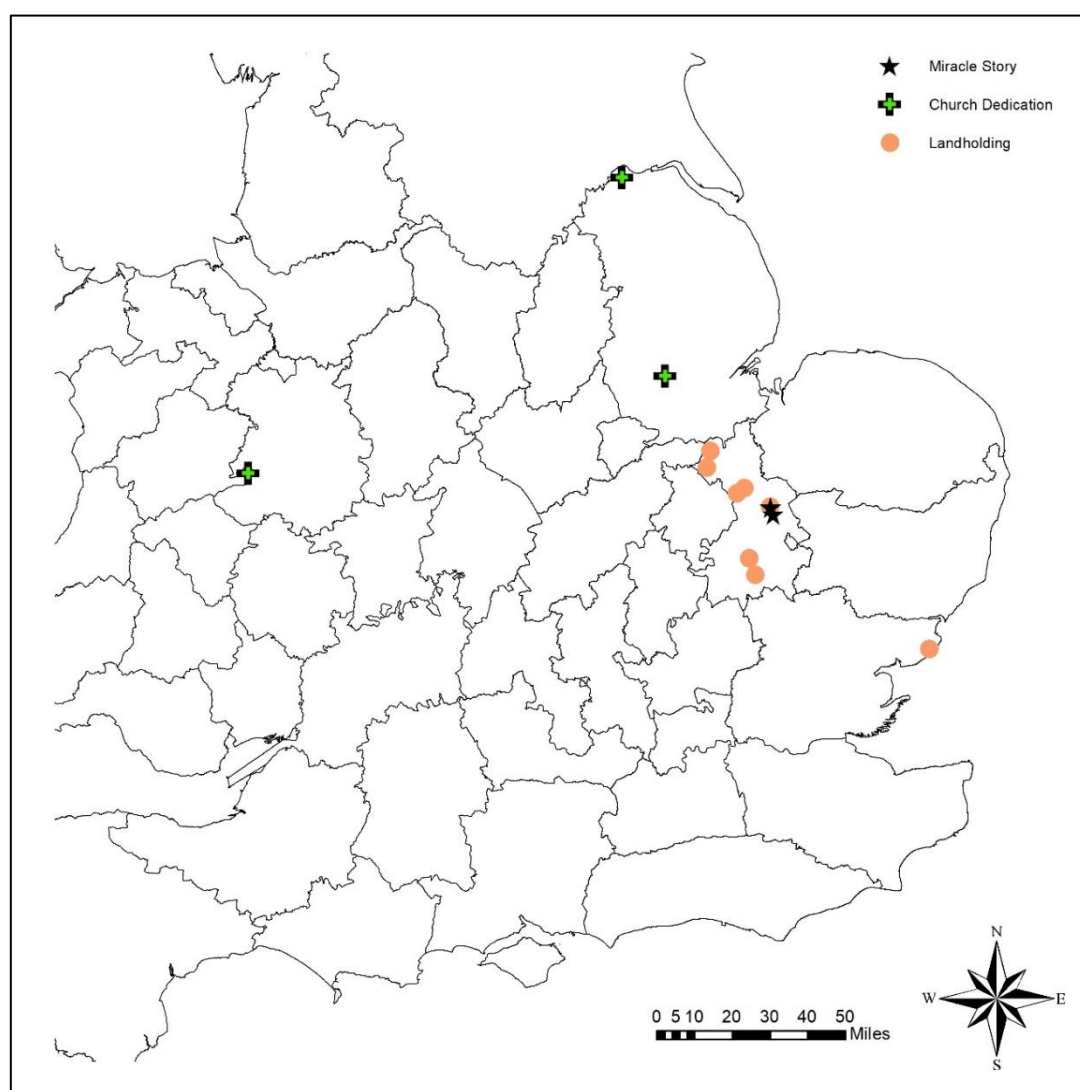


Figure 5. The Extent of Ely's Influence by 970.

The *LE* contains records of numerous land transactions in favour of Ely. It is, however, a twelfth-century composition and along with transcriptions of the charters relating to the Ely land transactions, it also contains hagiographical accounts of Æthelthryth's life and miracles and a comprehensive history of the foundation at Ely from its inception until just prior to the text's production. There are therefore inherent dangers in using the *LE* as a reliable historical record – as Catherine Clarke says, it is 'tenth-century Ely ... refracted through twelfth-century politics and agendas'.<sup>6</sup> However, analysis of surviving manuscripts has provided evidence to suggest that the charter records are accurate reflections of the original documents that detailed the tenth- and eleventh-century agreements. The entries in the *LE* are a transcript of an earlier text that survives in two virtually identical manuscripts from the twelfth century, London, British Library, Cotton, Vespasian A.xix and Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.2.41, known as the *Libellus Æthelwoldi episcopi* and commissioned by the first bishop of Ely, Hervey, sometime between 1109 and 1131.<sup>7</sup> The complete texts of the *Libellus* have been included as appendices in both Ernest Blake's 1962 edition of the *LE* and Janet Fairweather's 2005 translation.<sup>8</sup> The author of the *Libellus* wrote in its Prologue that Bishop Hervey had 'assigned me the task of translating them from the English language into Latin prose',<sup>9</sup> thus confirming that the *Libellus* compiled in the early twelfth century was a Latin translation of an Old English set of charters. Blake and subsequently Alan Kennedy have dated the original Old English version of the *Libellus* to or to

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine A M Clarke, *Writing Power in Anglo-Saxon England: Texts, Hierarchies, Economies* (Woodbridge, 2012), p. 146.

<sup>7</sup> *LE*(B), p. xxxiv. See also Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 4, and Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Wulfstan of Winchester: The Life of St Æthelwold* (Oxford, 1991), p. xlviii. The two Latin versions of the *Libellus* contained in the manuscripts mentioned above were transcribed initially in 1691, see Thomas Gale, ed., *Rerum Anglicarum Scriptorum Veterum II: Historiae Britannicae, Saxonicae, Anglo-Danicae Scriptores XV* (Oxford, 1691), pp. 463-488.

<sup>8</sup> See *LE*(B), Appendix A, pp. 395-399 and *LE*(F), Appendix A, pp. 486-491.

<sup>9</sup> 'mihi iniunxit, ut ea de Anglico idiomate in Latinum sermonem transferrem', *LE*(B), Appendix A, p. 396.

not long after the dates of the transactions it describes, and both attest to the accuracy of the translation from the original.<sup>10</sup>

According to the text of the charter, the Stonea land donation took place 'long before Bishop Æthelwold had formed the community of monks at Ely',<sup>11</sup> so prior to 970. The presence of Wulfstan of Dalham suggests an earliest date of the mid-950s, as the first reference to him occurs during the latter part of the reign of King Eadred (reigned 946 to 955).<sup>12</sup> Wulfstan is a recurring figure in the story of Ely's land acquisitions during Edgar's reign, identified no fewer than eight times in the charters as a benefactor to the Ely foundation, where he is variously described as either a privy counsellor<sup>13</sup> or a minister<sup>14</sup> of King Edgar.<sup>15</sup> He also was instrumental in the expulsion of secular clerics from the Old Minster at Winchester at the time Æthelwold had been appointed its bishop in 964.<sup>16</sup> The introduction of Wulfstan into Ely's story with respect to the Stonea land donation, a few years prior to the reforms instigated by Æthelwold, can be seen as having provided the bishop with an extra level of negotiating power at both a local (i.e. East Anglian) and inter-regional level. Not only was Wulfstan influential in the courts of Eadred and Edgar, he was also a significant regional figure, and this was important because of the political situation in England in the middle of the tenth century.

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<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*, p. x, and Alan Kennedy, 'Law and Litigation in the Libellus Æthelwoldi Episcopi', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 24 (1995), p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> '*Diu antequam Æðeluuoldus episcopus apud Hely monachos coadunasset*', *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 18, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup> Here he is referred to as a '*pedisecus*' (literally 'one who sits at the feet of') to King Eadred, which Ann Williams interprets as being nearly equal in importance to an ealdorman, see Ann Williams, *The World Before Domesday: The English Aristocracy 900-1066* (London, 2008), pp. 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> '*regi a secretis*', *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 2, p. 73. Williams translates this phrase as 'in the king's confidence', see Williams, *The World Before Domesday*, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup> '*regis sequipedus*', *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 28, p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Aside from the Stonea transaction and the two charters mentioned in notes 13 and 14, see also *ibid.*, Book II, chs. 7, 24, 35, 48, and 55, pp. 79-80, 97-98, 110, 116, and 126-127.

<sup>16</sup> His role in this event is described in Wulfstan of Winchester's *Life of Æthelwold*, see Winterbottom and Lapidge, eds., *Wulfstan: Life of St Æthelwold*, p. 33.

By this time Danish settlers had been living in England for three or four generations, and were actively engaging, and indeed intermarrying, with members of the native population.<sup>17</sup> The West Saxon kings had regained control of East Anglia from the Vikings earlier in the tenth century, but it was a location where tensions between the two groups were never far from the surface and therefore administration of the region tended to be undertaken more at a local level.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the presence of an influential local landholder who was also a trusted advisor to the king would have been hugely beneficial to Æthelwold in his campaign to revitalise the abbey at Ely through the accumulation of land in the region. Wulfstan had already demonstrated his effectiveness to Æthelwold with the successful displacement of clerics from the New Minster at Winchester, and so he would have been a natural choice to help the bishop acquire land in East Anglia, Wulfstan's home territory. The precedent of pledging land to the Ely foundation, an activity that would rapidly become widespread over the next three decades, had been set by an advisor to the king and a known ally of Æthelwold's. These connections and his success in resolving disputes and acquiring land effectively linked Wulfstan with the subsequent increase in Ely's landholdings, and ultimately the establishment of its power base in East Anglia.

The charter is very specific in naming Æthelthryth as the beneficiary of the land at Stonea, and this is a theme that is repeated in the majority of the land transactions recorded in the *Libellus*. The arguments as to the overall veracity of the twelfth-century Latin *Libellus* entries to the tenth-century Old English records for Ely have been made above,<sup>19</sup> while extant tenth-century charters from other foundations also record transactions where land was bequeathed specifically to their saint. For instance, a charter of c. 966 states that 'six ploughlands at

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew Innes, 'Danelaw Identities: Ethnicity, Regionalism, and Political Alliance', in D. M. Hadley and J. D. Richards, eds., *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Turnhout, 2000), p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 81 and pp. 84-85.

<sup>19</sup> See note 10.



Wouldham be given to St Andrew at Rochester',<sup>20</sup> while another of similar date from Sherborne declares that 'I, King Edgar, declare in this book, which is a gospel book, that I have granted 5 hides at Osborne to God and St Mary for myself and my ancestors who rest there at Sherborne ...'.<sup>21</sup> Given that there is a precedent for tenth-century bequests to be made to saints, it can be surmised that the Ely land could have been pledged in the same way, and, if this was the case, it is a significant indication of the importance of Æthelthryth to the security and prosperity of the abbey. The naming of the saint as the recipient of the land meant that she had assumed the role of its custodian and protector, a quality that is reinforced repeatedly throughout the narratives of her life. By bequeathing the land directly to the saint, the donor can be seen as redefining and expanding the boundaries of the saint's influence, or, as Amy Remensnyder puts it, 'creating a bounded physical space as meaningfully charged as his or her body'.<sup>22</sup>

The Stonea land transaction was not the only event recorded in the *LE* as having taken place in the second half of the tenth century, and which could be seen as a precursor to the Æthelwoldian reforms. Following immediately after chapters telling of the miracle of the blinded Viking and a summary of the English kings for the subsequent eighty years, the narrative tells of a priest being struck down with an illness and his family being killed after he had attempted to see what was inside Æthelthryth's tomb. He had inserted a candle on the end of a stick through the hole in the side of the shrine made one hundred years earlier by the ill-fated Viking raider.<sup>23</sup> The saint's response was as vengeful as it had been previously, with the priest's wife, children, and two of his accomplices being killed, and the priest himself being spared but paralysed. It was only after subsequent pleading to Æthelthryth by his parents that he was

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<sup>20</sup> 'þus wæron ða seox sulung æt Wuldaham sċe Andrea geseald into Hrofesceastre', Agnes Jane Robertson, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (Cambridge, 1939), Charter XLI, pp. 84-85.

<sup>21</sup> 'Ic EADGER cing cyððe on þisse bec þ is Cristes boc þ ic habba þa fif hyda æt Womburnan agifen Gode 7 Sċa MARIA for me sylfe 7 for mine yldran ðe par restat æt Scireburnan ...', *ibid.*, Charter L, pp. 104-105.

<sup>22</sup> Amy G Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca, New York, 1995), p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> *LE(B)*, Book I, chs. 48 and 49, pp. 59-61.

restored to health, and he was only allowed back into the monastery on the proviso that he admitted his wrongdoing and pledged his loyalty to Æthelthryth and the sanctity of her shrine. There is a subtext that exists within this narrative, however, which is the miracle story's author's attempt to portray the secular priests as unfit to guard Æthelthryth's relics. He described the priests both as 'wicked men',<sup>24</sup> and 'canonical by name, not by worth',<sup>25</sup> and in narrating the miracle stories he was warning the priest not to meddle with the shrine, a message that was ignored with grave consequences. The author ended this passage by lamenting the fact that it was at least another fifteen years before the monastery was re-founded by Æthelwold under Benedictine rule. The inference here was that the secular priests were not worthy of the responsibility of keeping the shrine safe, and that this could only be ensured once monks had been installed and the priests usurped, and in the meantime, the sanctity of the shrine would be upheld through the intervention of the saint herself.

This vengeful story appears as the final one of a compilation of six miracles that comprise the final few chapters of the first book of the *LE*.<sup>26</sup> The other five miracles are curative in nature, covering a range of afflictions including paralysis, blindness, the inability to speak, and a serious injury to a limb, which together served to demonstrate the range of Æthelthryth's healing powers. The story of the curious priest acts as an envelope within which the curative miracles are enclosed, since they are preceded by an account of how he wished to prove whether the body of the saint was still intact, or, as he suspected, whether it was in fact contained inside the sarcophagus at all. He was admonished by another of the priests, who suggested that since he was a 'recent newcomer ... [he had] scarcely seen the miraculous acts of power which the

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<sup>24</sup> '*sceleratorum*', *ibid.*, Book I, ch. 49, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> '*... canonicis nomine, non dignitate*', *ibid.*, Book I, ch. 43, p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, chs. 44-48, pp. 58-60.

Creator of things brought about, in numbers beyond counting, through the merits of this holy virgin'.<sup>27</sup>

The chapters of the *LE* recounting these miracle stories were transcribed from an earlier twelfth-century Ely manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 393 (CCCC MS 393), which itself states that it is a reworking of a previous version. As Rosalind Love says, this earliest miracle collection could have been compiled at any time between the events themselves taking place and the production of CCCC MS 393, although she points to the style of writing of the narrative to date it to the time of the Benedictine Reforms. The manuscript uses what has become known as the 'hermeneutic style', which was directly linked to the events taking place in the late tenth century.<sup>28</sup> The miracles appear in the *LE* consecutively, after an introductory phrase noting that they were written by a monk named Ælfhelm, and are referred to as 'a very small number among the many which were performed'.<sup>29</sup> Ælfhelm was a resident at Ely during the period leading up to the reforms, and a compelling argument has been made by Love suggesting that he was both writer and subject of the narrative, and that he was telling his own story as a cautionary tale against the clerics and in favour of the reforms that were to follow.<sup>30</sup>

In the century from 870 to 970, then, Ely's progress was still very much inhibited by the effects of the Viking raids from the second half of the ninth century – it is described in the *LE* as 'destitute of worship'.<sup>31</sup> However, evidence of the changes and reforms that were to come is present in both the detail of the Stonea land donation and Ælfhelm's miracle collection. These seemingly disparate events can be seen collectively as the first ripples of what was to become a

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<sup>27</sup> *'quia noviter ad istam ... minime virtutum vidisti miracula que conditor rerum peregit innumerabilia per huius sacre virginis merita'*, *ibid.*, Book I, ch. 43, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. lxiv.

<sup>29</sup> *'ex quibus ex pluribus ... qui paulo antequam huc adventares sunt patrata'*, *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 43, p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> See Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. lxiii.

<sup>31</sup> *'cuius loci desolatio'*, *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 1, p. 72. This chapter describes the abbey's re-foundation, and the event is corroborated by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for the same year (Benjamin Thorpe, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1861), vol. 23, s.a. 970).

tidal wave of change for Ely and its community. The introduction of Wulfstan of Dalham as the intermediary between the widow Æscwyn and the monastery for the donation of land at Stonea signals the commencement of the strategy of land acquisition that became a feature of the reforms at Ely. Wulfstan's links to both Æthelwold and King Edgar then served to legitimise the transaction in the context of the events that followed, while his status as an influential East Anglian landowner helped to ensure that any potential local objections were overcome. The naming of Æthelthryth as the beneficiary of the land also set a precedent, increasing her sphere of influence while at the same time giving the impression that the asset transfer was justified in the eyes of Ely's patron saint. Her interventions as described in the miracle stories were an early indication of the influence which she would be able to bring to bear in favour of the reforms that would follow. Vanderputten highlights the legitimisation of reforming bishops' actions as paramount to their success, suggesting that achieving their goals came about from the cumulative effect of the completion of a number of individual initiatives, sometimes spanning more than one generation.<sup>32</sup> This overriding premise would also hold true in Ely's case, although the elapsed time taken to introduce the Benedictine Rule into the monastery would be considerably shorter.

### **The Introduction of the Rule of St Benedict and Ely's Initial Expansion**

The monastery was re-founded in 970 during the reign of King Edgar, who instructed the reforming Bishop Æthelwold to introduce the Rule of St Benedict, and to replace its secular priests with monks.<sup>33</sup> The king reciprocated by subsequently selling the surrounding land to the bishop who then granted it to the Ely monastery, for the most part naming Æthelthryth as the beneficiary, and thus following the precedent set at Stonea a few years earlier. This was the

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<sup>32</sup> Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process*, pp. 9 and 29.

<sup>33</sup> See Winterbottom and Lapidge, eds., *Wulfstan: Life of St Æthelwold*, p. 23 and *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 1, pp. 72-73.

start of an increase in Ely's landholdings which was to continue through the reign of three successive kings, and which can be seen in two distinct phases, with the first of these, under Edgar, lasting from 970 to 975. An analysis of the pattern of land acquisitions based on the charter records contained within the *Libellus* shows that during this time the majority of the land was being acquired within the county of Cambridgeshire. After Edgar's death and with the succession first of Edward and then Æthelred from 978, the focus changed, with far more land being acquired further afield from Ely. These two phases represented the initial expansion of Ely's influence in the area, as Æthelwold first sought to solidify the foothold he had secured with the re-foundation of the abbey, and then to consolidate his position through the acquisition of land across the wider East Anglian region.

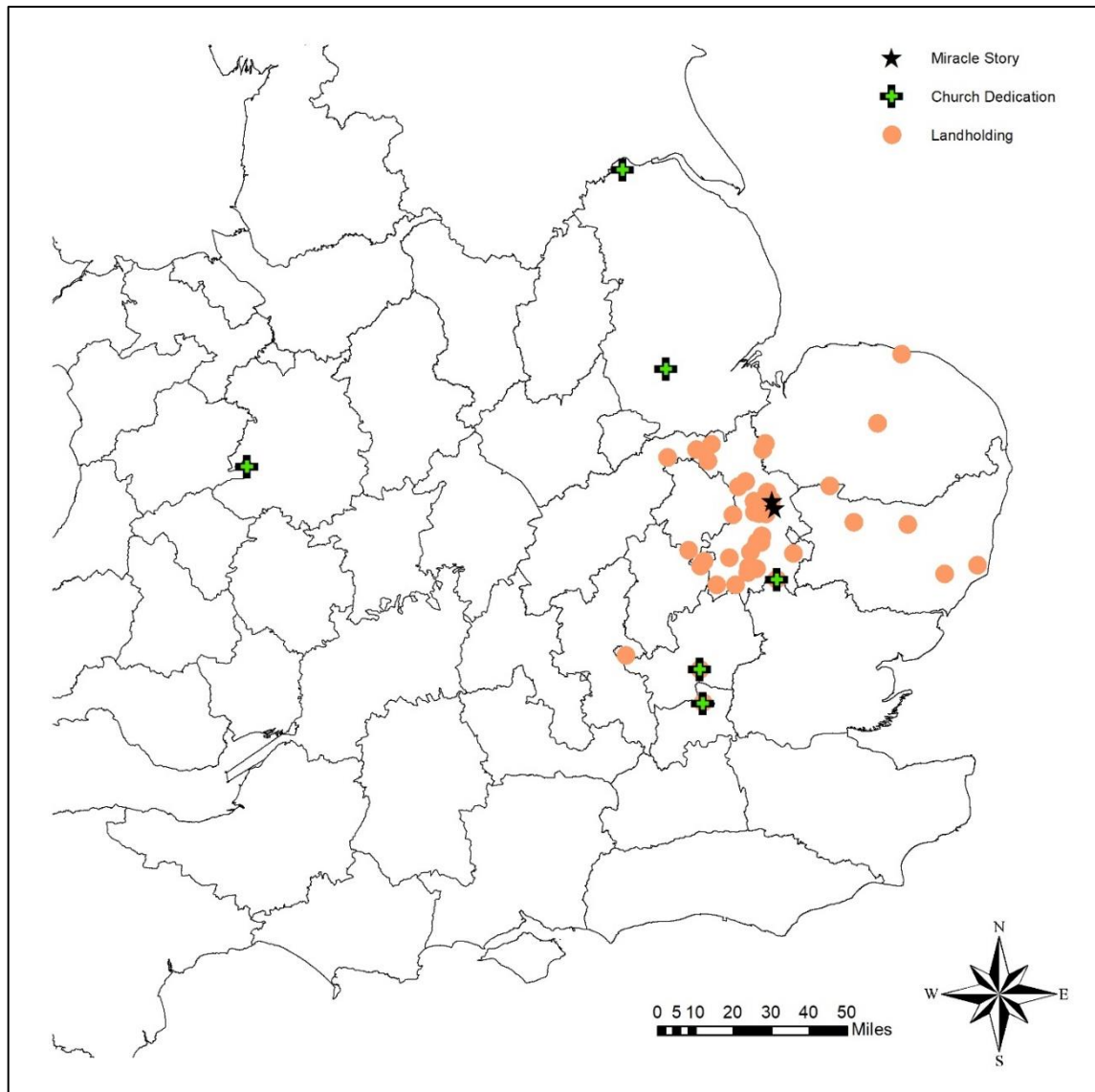


Figure 6. The Extent of Ely's Influence by 975.

Æthelwold's successful reform of the abbey at Ely was not achieved only through a programme of land acquisition. His assiduous use of the character and story of St Æthelthryth to convey his message to both the religious community and the laity was also a key component of his approach. The saint's royal heritage and the example she had set, as narrated through Bede's hagiography and Ælfhelm's miracle collection, were powerful tools that Æthelwold was able to use to portray his reforms as the bright and positive antithesis of the dark and ungodly period prior to the re-foundation. His use of the relics of Æthelthryth to achieve his goal of a powerful

and stable monastery at the heart of a network of reformed Benedictine institutions is shown to be a strategy that was not unique, but that was a template that was to be repeated within a number of East Anglian monasteries. Of these, however, Ely was the first, and arguably therefore, the most important.

The king's choice of Æthelwold was well-founded, as the bishop had gained a reputation both as a hard-headed businessman and a wise and educated scholar and teacher.<sup>34</sup> A great deal of what we know of Æthelwold is as a result of the writing of his *vitae* by two Winchester monks: Wulfstan, whose *Life* was written at the time of Æthelwold's canonisation in 996, and Ælfric, who completed his work (which was probably based on Wulfstan's) in 1006, twenty-two years after the bishop's death. Augmenting these narratives – which were likely to have been compiled in order to promote the cult of Æthelwold at Winchester<sup>35</sup> – are details that have been gleaned from a variety of charters and administrative documents from the monasteries with which he was involved.<sup>36</sup> Æthelwold was born, raised, and received his religious training in Winchester, and it was here that he would have been exposed to the teachings of the continental Benedictine houses by visiting monks. During the 930s and 940s, and along with Dunstan, also of Winchester and the founder of the abbey at Glastonbury, and Oswald, who was the nephew of the reformist Archbishop Odo and who grew up at the Benedictine abbey of Fleury, Æthelwold absorbed the Benedictine texts and then began to disseminate the teachings and ethos of Benedict throughout the monasteries of the south of England.<sup>37</sup> Central to the reforms was the *Regularis Concordia*, a document which laid down the rules for monks on how

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<sup>34</sup> See Michael Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', in B. Yorke, ed., *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence* (Woodbridge, 1997), for an in-depth analysis of Æthelwold's work and reputation.

<sup>35</sup> See Michael Winterbottom, ed., *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi: Three Lives of English Saints* (Toronto, 1972), for Latin versions of both Wulfstan's and Ælfric's *Lives*. Michael Lapidge has presented the evidence supporting the hypothesis that Ælfric's *Life* is a later abbreviation of that of Wulfstan, see Winterbottom and Lapidge, eds., *Wulfstan: Life of St Æthelwold*, which is based on earlier analysis done by Douglas Fisher in Douglas J V Fisher, 'The Early Biographers of St Æthelwold', *English Historical Review*, 67 (1952).

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Yorke, 'Introduction', in B. Yorke, ed., *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 350.

to behave, set out times for prayer, meals, and rest, and generally reverted back to an approach based to a greater extent on scriptural teachings, much more akin to that purported by Bede two centuries earlier.<sup>38</sup>

There were two key aspects to the reforms in England that distinguished them from their continental counterparts and that were instrumental to their success here. First, the reforming bishops had the backing, sometimes forcefully, of the crown, and second, their familiarity with the writings of Bede meant they had ready-made, home-grown examples of the behaviours they were trying to introduce.<sup>39</sup> The patronage of the king was important to the success of the reforms that Æthelwold and his compatriots were pushing through, and so, in what could be seen as a *quid pro quo* for this support, included within the *Regularis Concordia* were instructions specifically relating to prayers for the royal family.<sup>40</sup> His links to the incumbent king were not the only royal connections Æthelwold was able to use to his advantage when he came to reform the foundation at Ely, however. Ely was the first of the East Anglian abbeys to be subjected to Æthelwold's plans, and it is likely that one of the reasons he chose to start here was Æthelthryth's royal heritage, of which he would have been aware from Bede's writings.<sup>41</sup> As David Rollason has pointed out, political advantage and increased influence could be garnered by the crown if they associated themselves with cults of relics, especially those of a royal saint,<sup>42</sup> and Æthelwold's relationship with Edgar would have been enhanced through his emphasis of Æthelthryth's lineage.

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<sup>38</sup> Simon Keynes, 'Edgar Rex Admirabilis', in D. Scragg, ed., *Edgar, King of the English 959-975* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 350; Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?*, p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> Patrick Wormald says that this intervention was 'unparalleled in other customaries', Patrick Wormald, 'Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast', in B. Yorke, ed., *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Lapidge has undertaken a study of Æthelwold's writings and concludes that Bede's *HE* would have been one of half a dozen books that he would definitely have had access to and known well. See Michael Lapidge, 'Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher', in *ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> Rollason says that the crown used the relics to justify their actions judicially while increasing support for themselves and emphasising their closeness to the church and its teachings. David W Rollason, 'Relic-



The second advantage the Benedictine bishops had when implementing the reforms in England versus those on the continent was their familiarity with Bede's *HE*, and thus with the examples of good behaviour contained within it. Bede's writing was aimed specifically at the architects of the burgeoning Northumbrian church of the eighth century,<sup>43</sup> providing them with a set of role models upon which they should base their own behaviours, and one of the most important of these in Bede's eyes was Æthelthryth. As a virgin saint her life epitomised that of Mary, and therefore she was an ideal subject both for Bede to use to reinforce his message, and then later for Æthelwold to put forward as a model for the monks he was installing in place of the secular clerics.

The suitability of Æthelthryth for Æthelwold to use as a role model was not only confined to her comparison with the Virgin Mary. He would also have been very aware of the interventions that she had made, often with violent or even deadly results, against those who threatened Ely or interfered with her shrine, and he used this element of her character to add weight to his argument that the monastery's secular priests should be replaced with monks. This very action was completed by Æthelwold fewer than twenty years after the priest Ælfhelm's misguided attempt to prove Æthelthryth's remains still lay in her tomb, and Æthelwold would have been able to point to the priest's experiences as endorsement of his actions, and it is possible that he may even have commissioned Ælfhelm to write them in the first place.<sup>44</sup> Æthelthryth's punishment of the priest and subsequent acceptance of his remorse along with his renewed loyalty to her shrine lent tacit legitimacy to Æthelwold's overthrow of the clerics and their replacement by the monks.

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Cults as an Instrument of Royal Policy c. 900 - c. 1050', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 15 (1986), pp. 92, 98, and 101.

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, pp. 62-63 and p. 70, and Gransden, 'Bede's Reputation as an Historian in Medieval England', pp. 398-399, for commentary on Bede's target audience for the *HE*.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Keynes mentions that Ælfhelm was 'then moved or prevailed upon to write his account of the earlier period in the interests of the new [i.e. Æthelwold's] regime', Keynes, *Ely Abbey 672-1109*, p. 16.

Æthelwold's justification in usurping the clergy is reinforced in the *LE* by a further miraculous intervention. In the lead-up to the ejection of the clerics, an impasse occurred between them and the king's envoys on the one hand, and Dunstan, the Benedictine archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Æthelwold, and the monastic community led by the future abbot Byrhtnoth, on the other. All the parties were assembled at the abbey in Winchester, where, once the arguments had turned to silent stalemate, a stone carving of Christ 'displayed human characteristics'<sup>45</sup> and spoke out against the king's representatives, at which point they fled the building. The replacement of the clergy by the monastic community took place very soon afterwards, thus reiterating that the bishop's right (which by implication came from God) to bring the monks into the abbey usurped that of the king. This same miracle appears initially in Osbern's *Life of Dunstan*, which was written in 1070 but based on an earlier text,<sup>46</sup> from which it is likely that the author of the *LE* copied it, and so it appears that the pre-Conquest reformers were using devotion to the Holy Cross as part of their strategy to replace the clerics.<sup>47</sup>

Æthelwold's *vitae* tell us that in the years before he was appointed to the abbacy at Winchester, he was first accepted into the monastic community at Glastonbury, sometime before 940,<sup>48</sup> and it was at Glastonbury that he would have had his initial direct experience of the Rule of St Benedict, since it was about this time that Dunstan, the abbey's first bishop, implemented the Benedictine reforms there. Fifteen years later, Æthelwold was himself able to put into practice what he had witnessed at Glastonbury, as he was appointed abbot of the then derelict monastery at Abingdon where he built a church and rebuilt the cloister. Alan Thacker says that Abingdon was the 'model house which provided the pattern for Æthelwold's other great

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<sup>45</sup> '*humanos exprimens modos*', *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 51, p. 118.

<sup>46</sup> William Stubbs, ed., *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1874), p. 113.

<sup>47</sup> Alan Thacker, 'Æthelwold and Abingdon', in B. Yorke, ed., *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 60.

<sup>48</sup> 'Wulfstan's *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*', in Winterbottom, ed., *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*, ch. 9; 'Ælfric's *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*', in *ibid.*, ch. 6.

foundations',<sup>49</sup> and since he moved from there to Winchester, from where the majority of his subsequent reforms (commencing with that of Ely) were co-ordinated, the use of Abingdon as a template is a reasonable conclusion to draw.

Æthelwold specifically chose Ely as the first of the East Anglian monasteries to be reformed however,<sup>50</sup> and this does suggest that the relics of Æthelthryth were somehow special and of elevated importance in comparison to the other saints he was responsible for promoting. The *LE* tells us that Æthelwold not only instigated the revival of the cult of Æthelthryth once he had taken control of the monastery at Ely, but that he also promoted the cult of her relative St Wihtburh.<sup>51</sup> He also translated the relics of St Swithun at Winchester, St Eadburg at the foundation at Nunnaminster and those of St Tancred, St Torhtred, and St Tova at Thorney Abbey, and in all of these cases, commissioned expensive and lavishly decorated reliquaries within which to house them.<sup>52</sup> All of these are examples of much earlier Anglo-Saxon saints' cults being revived by Æthelwold as a way of recalling a prior age of stricter monasticism, and in this regard his treatment of the relics of Æthelthryth are no different. However, the *LE* says that Æthelwold found Æthelthryth's remains near the high altar of the church but that he left them untouched, 'not in concealment beneath the earth but raised up above it',<sup>53</sup> thus emphasising the allusion that her relics were not only of great importance, but also that they should be revered but not interfered with.

The cult of St Æthelthryth was key to the success of Æthelwold's plans. It has already been mentioned that the saint's actions and example were chosen by the bishop as exemplars of behaviour to the monks who were being installed in the monastery. Æthelwold needed Æthelthryth's cult to be successful, and successful cults needed to be continually promoted by

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<sup>49</sup> Thacker, *Æthelwold and Abingdon*, p. 58.

<sup>50</sup> Winterbottom and Lapidge, eds., *Wulstan: Life of St Æthelwold*, chs. 23-24.

<sup>51</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 53, pp. 120-123.

<sup>52</sup> Thacker, *Æthelwold and Abingdon*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>53</sup> '*non sub terra delitescens, sed desuper eminentum*', *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 52, p. 120.

the institutions at their centre, and an ideal way of achieving this was the translation of the relics housed there, often in association with the building of a new church or the extension of the existing one.<sup>54</sup> The motivations behind translating relics were rather more complex than they appeared on the surface, as this type of activity was costly and involved planning that sometimes would have commenced years before. Æthelwold is reported as subjecting the building to ‘painstaking restoration’, which, once completed in 970, included an altar that housed the elevated tomb of Æthelthryth.<sup>55</sup> Although Æthelthryth’s remains were not removed from the sarcophagus, nor was the tomb opened to reveal the corpse inside, Æthelwold ensured that the altar was ‘adorned with royal cloths and vessels, being itself decorated with gold and precious stones’,<sup>56</sup> reminiscent of the ceremony that surrounded Æthelthryth’s first translation three centuries earlier. The restoration of the church and the celebration of the relics that accompanied its completion were the starting point of Ely’s revival at the end of the tenth century as a Benedictine institution, and Æthelwold purposely put Æthelthryth’s relics at the forefront of his efforts to re-establish Ely’s position as a powerful centre of religious practice.

This focus by Æthelwold on the relics of Æthelthryth allowed him to utilise different aspects of her story and character to justify and strengthen the legitimacy of his actions. The combination of her royal heritage (as the daughter of a king, and wife of both a prince and a king), her swift and vengeful punishment of those who interfered with or threatened the community at Ely (such as Ælfhelm), and the contrasting approach she took to those who repented and agreed to follow the Benedictine Rule (again, the example of Ælfhelm is a case in point), were used to reinforce the premise that the reforms were a story of good usurping evil. Æthelthryth’s lineage was used as a means of providing royal sanction to the reforms, while the ungodly clerics were

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<sup>54</sup> Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>55</sup> ‘*diligenter restaurando*’, *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 1, p. 73.

<sup>56</sup> ‘*regalibus atque vasis, auro et pretiosis lapidibus decoratum*’, *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 3, p. 75.

redeemed if they were seen to mend their ways. The use of hagiography to paint a picture of how Benedictine reform was able to turn a dark past into a bright future is a theme not restricted to the case of the Ely monastery,<sup>57</sup> and the imagery of evil and darkness being swept away by 'golden ages' (*aurea secla*) is also one that has been repeated.<sup>58</sup> St Æthelthryth was therefore an excellent role model through whom the bishop was able to promote his message and vindicate his actions.

During Edgar's reign, Æthelwold's focus was on increasing the foundation's landholding, and therefore its influence, within the borders of Cambridgeshire itself, evident from the map in Figure 6, above. In the five years between Æthelwold's introduction of monks into the abbey and Edgar's death, twenty-nine transactions, representing two-thirds of the total number, took place involving land in Ely's county, compared with a total of sixteen from counties outside Cambridgeshire. This concentration of land within Cambridgeshire is further evidenced by the accounts in the *LE*, which show that Æthelwold was in some cases swapping his landholding outside of the county for others within it.<sup>59</sup> A charter from the same year as the re-founding of the abbey legitimised Ely's claims over the land that Æthelwold had secured, while also granting the rights to the income from fines levied by courts on the communities' people, and for the abbot to hold his own courts within the Isle of Ely itself.<sup>60</sup>

Land and property were more than just the definition of the wealth of the monastery (although as a statement of its success, they were clearly a major factor), they came to characterise its identity through the incorporation both of the community of people that inhabited the endowed land and of the legacy of the person making the endowment, and, especially true of

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<sup>57</sup> Vanderputten has analysed the Flemish reforms and demonstrated that a similar model could be applied there too, see Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process*, pp. 25-29.

<sup>58</sup> See Clarke, *Writing Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>59</sup> See for instance *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 4, pp. 75-76, which describes how Æthelwold gained control from the king of twenty hides of land on the Isle of Ely in exchange for sixty hides at Harting in Sussex.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, pp. 25-26; Seiriol Evans, *The Medieval Estate of the Cathedral Priory of Ely: A Preliminary Survey* (Ely, 1973), p. 2.

the founding (or re-founding) of a monastery, through the saint to which the land was bequeathed.<sup>61</sup> Therefore Ely not only gained rights over the land and the people living there as a result of the endowments of Edgar and Æthelwold, but it was also able to forge a link between its benefactors, based on their reputations and legacies, and their saint Æthelthryth, which was subsequently used as the foundation of a strong narrative history for the monastery. The monks felt their justification for the appropriation of the lands and properties in the vicinity of Ely was stronger through the patronage of figures such as Edgar and Æthelwold, and Æthelthryth's intervention could be called upon at any time they felt that their rights were under threat. The bishop was a great supporter of the reign of Edgar and the king had been a pupil of Æthelwold's while he was the abbot of Abingdon between 950 and 953, and so the relationship between king and bishop was a close one. Barbara Yorke in her biography of Æthelwold says that he was the recipient of 'due respect and patronage' from the royalty of the time,<sup>62</sup> and from this it can be deduced that an endowment from the bishop would be held in equal esteem as one from the king. Indeed, the terms by which the two are described in the *LE* are very similar in their magnanimity.

An explicit way of demonstrating the saint's rights to the land that had been donated to her was through the dedication of the communities' parish churches, and two or three can be traced back to the period of Edgar's reign. Of the dedications that occur in Cambridgeshire, that of the church at Linton, currently dedicated to St Mary but noted by Virginia Blanton to previously have been an Æthelthryth dedication,<sup>63</sup> is situated on land that was transferred to the abbey at Ely between 959 and 1008. The *LE* details how two separate tranches were appropriated by the abbot, the first of which was bestowed by King Edgar,<sup>64</sup> with the second being transferred to

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<sup>61</sup> Remensnyder talks about the deeper significance of endowments, and especially royal ones, in building the legacy (or the legend) of a foundation, Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, pp. 69-74.

<sup>62</sup> Yorke, *Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century*, p. 65.

<sup>63</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 306.

<sup>64</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 9, pp. 81-82.

abbot Ælfsige from Æthelred the Unready in 1008,<sup>65</sup> and so the dedication may have dated from either of these two periods.

Away from Cambridgeshire, the two slightly outlying dedications that can be seen on the map in Figure 6 to the south of Ely can definitely be traced back to the period before 975. Land was given by Edgar 'to God and St Æthelthryth' in the district of Hatfield in Hertfordshire as the fulfilment of a promise he made to Æthelwold that he would venerate and improve the monastery at Ely after the Benedictine monks had been installed there.<sup>66</sup> The area was heavily wooded and was therefore a lucrative piece of land as a source of timber for building and firewood. After Edgar's death in 975, Ely's claim to Hatfield was disputed and the monks were ultimately compelled to purchase the land in order to secure their rights over it.<sup>67</sup> Hatfield was transferred to the bishops of Ely when the bishopric was created in 1109 and stayed in their possession until it was exchanged for a number of landholdings in Essex in 1538. The location of Hatfield, conveniently situated on the main route between Ely and London, meant that it was used as a stopping point by the bishops, and a house was built for them there before the end of the twelfth century which was progressively extended and improved and which subsequently became known as the bishops' palace.<sup>68</sup> It was during this period that the town became known as Bishop's Hatfield.<sup>69</sup> A fair was granted in 1226, to be held for four days around the feast of Æthelthryth (23 June), and which was moved in 1318 to October, commemorating the translations of her relics.<sup>70</sup> St Etheldreda's church is located adjacent to the bishop's palace, and, although the earliest parts of the current church date from the thirteenth century, there

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Book II, ch. 77, pp. 145-146.

<sup>66</sup> 'Deo sancteque Æðeldreðe', ibid., Book II, ch. 7, p. 79.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Book II, ch. 7, pp. 78-79; 'Parishes: Hatfield', in W. Page, ed., *A History of the County of Hertford* (London, 1912), vol. 3, p. 91.

<sup>68</sup> *VCH Hertford: Parishes, Hatfield*, p. 92.

<sup>69</sup> Jocelyn Antrobus, *Hatfield and its People: Part 7, Churches* (Hatfield, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> *VCH Hertford: Parishes, Hatfield*, p. 98.

are monuments within it from the mid-twelfth century and the dedication to Æthelthryth is likely to date from its foundation.<sup>71</sup>

The settlement of Totteridge, twelve miles south of Hatfield, was included in the gift of land given by Edgar to Ely in 970, although this is only confirmed in the mid-twelfth century during an audit of landholdings undertaken by the incumbent bishop, Nigel, where it is listed as Thaderege.<sup>72</sup> The first reference to St Etheldreda's church at Totteridge is in 1248 where a charter notes that the bishop of Ely was able to appoint chaplains to celebrate mass there,<sup>73</sup> while in the fourteenth century the bishop had a residence there which included a private chapel.<sup>74</sup> The current dedication is to St Andrew, although this dates from the sixteenth century and there is a suggestion that it could be a corruption of St Audrey, which is itself an anglicised form of Æthelthryth.<sup>75</sup>

By 975, Ely's landholding had increased to cover a substantial proportion of Cambridgeshire, Ely's county. Æthelwold, acting with the authority of King Edgar, had successfully re-founded the monastery through the calculated use of Æthelthryth's character to portray the reformed institution as the epitome of a golden age of spirituality that was the opposite of the dark period it had succeeded. The death of Edgar brought about a change of strategy, however, where the emphasis was on consolidation and patronage, and which brought with it a new textual tradition of Æthelthryth that was ultimately to continue the spread of the saint's influence across England, progress that was only curtailed by the Norman Conquest.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>72</sup> *LE(B)*, Book III, ch. 48, p. 287.

<sup>73</sup> 'Parishes: Totteridge', in W. Page, ed., *A History of the County of Hertford* (London, 1912), vol. 3, p. 148.

<sup>74</sup> 'St Andrew's Church', (2014), <https://www.totteridgechurch.org.uk/history>, accessed 23 February 2018.

<sup>75</sup> *VCH Hertford: Parishes, Totteridge*, p. 149.



### **The Consolidation of Ely's Influence and the Beginning of a New Textual Tradition**

On the death of Edgar in 975, the English crown passed firstly to his eldest son, Edward, and then, following Edward's murder at Corfe Castle three years later, to Æthelred. This succession of monarchs did not impede the growth of Ely's influence in East Anglia, and the *Libellus* contains many accounts of land transactions in favour of Ely that took place in the period between 975 and Æthelred's death in 1016. There was, however, a change in the geographical spread of the donations which was a result of a change of benefactor. While Edgar had been the principal provider of land to Æthelwold's new foundation until 975, during Æthelred's reign Ely benefitted primarily from the patronage of wealthy landowners. Miller has also noted this change, which saw a move away from purchases by Ely from the king, to bequests and gifts, and he interpreted this as an indication of the established nature of the Benedictine order's monasticism at this time.<sup>76</sup> By 1016, a further fifty-seven land transactions are recorded, of which thirty, so fifty-three per cent, were for areas outside Cambridgeshire. This shift in the focus of acquisition away from Cambridgeshire and more towards the other East Anglian counties after 975 becomes very clear when the numbers of transactions undertaken within the reigns of the two monarchs are compared, as shown in Figure 7, below.

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<sup>76</sup> Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 21.

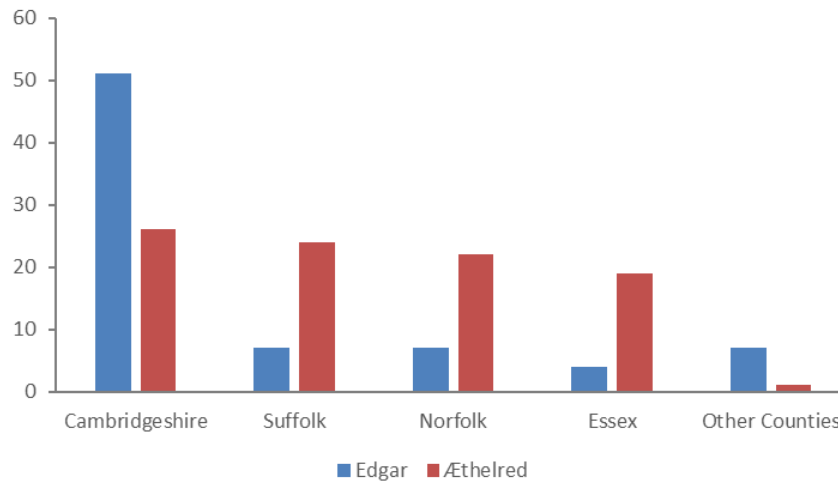


Figure 7. Ely Landholding Acquisitions between 970 and 1016.

The end of the first millennium also saw the production of two texts of Æthelthryth's life that would ultimately be responsible for a significant growth in knowledge of the saint and her story, and the inclusion of her feast days in ecclesiastical calendars and litanies. The scriptorium of Winchester, Æthelwold's bishopric, was the centre from which these textual tendrils would spread, and it would not be long before monastic communities throughout East Anglia, the south and west of England, and the Midlands would be able to celebrate the saint's feast day or invoke her name within the litany. These two texts served to reaffirm the importance Æthelwold placed on the relics of the saint at Ely, as well as his desire to disseminate her story to as wide an audience as possible. Prior to these texts being produced, however, the accession of Æthelred the Unready to the English throne resulted in an increase in the number of wealthy patrons donating land to the foundation and an expansion in the geographical area Ely's holdings would cover.

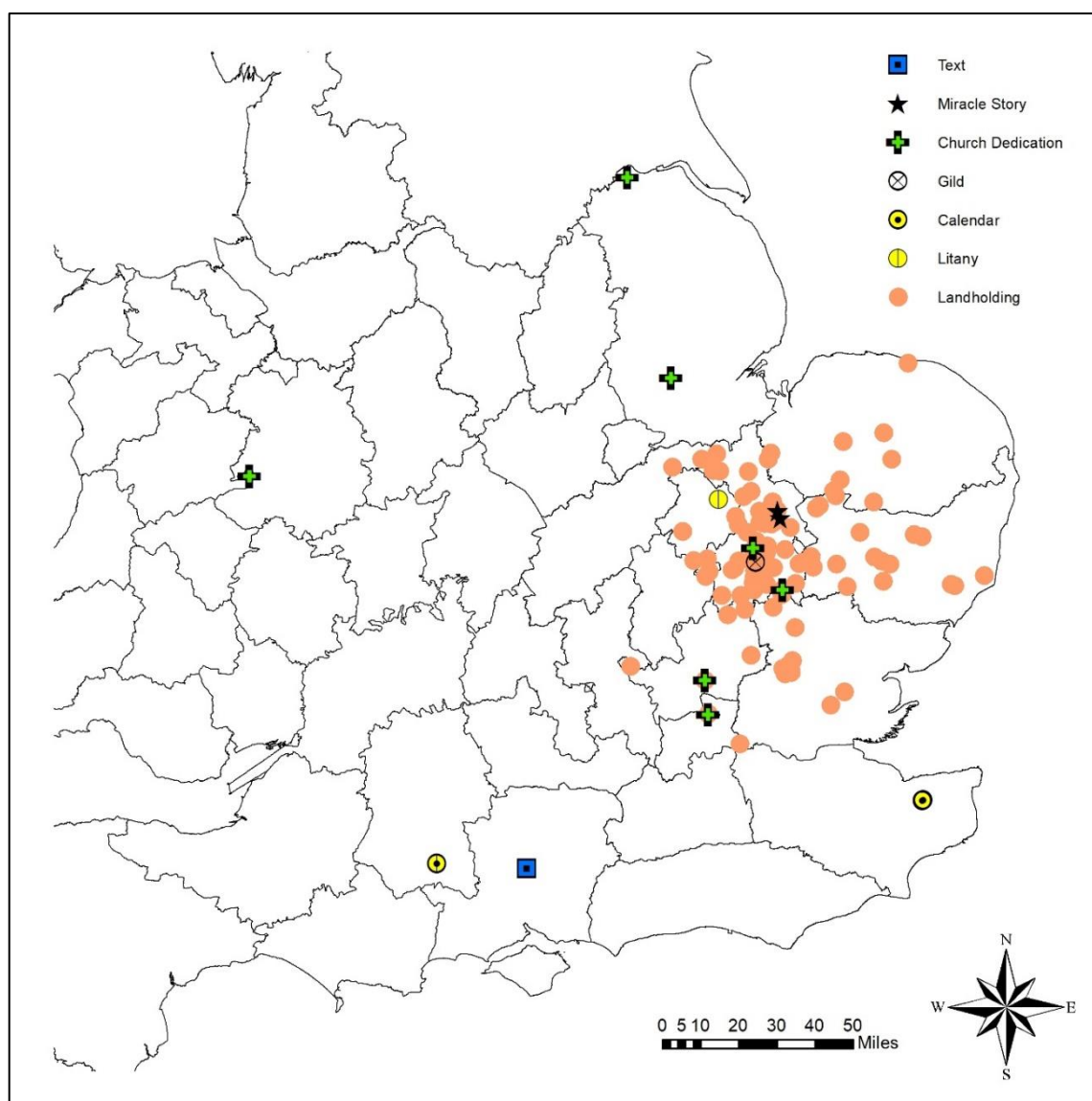


Figure 8. The Extent of Ely's Influence by 1016.

Only two new church dedications are recorded during this time, those of Histon and Impington, both of which are in Cambridgeshire. St Etheldreda's church at Histon was demolished soon after the Reformation,<sup>77</sup> and the Victoria County History records that it was almost in ruins in 1588, and that it is now identifiable only through earthworks.<sup>78</sup> The land that contained the two

<sup>77</sup> Simon Cotton, 'Church Dedications', in C. Hicks, ed., *Cambridgeshire Churches* (Stamford, 1997), p. 210.

<sup>78</sup> 'Chesterton, Northstowe, and Papworth Hundreds: Histon Churches', in A. P. M. Wright and C. P. Lewis, eds., *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely* (London, 1989), vol. 9, p. 106.

parishes of Histon and the adjoining village of Impington was already owned in the mid-eleventh century by the bishop of Lincoln (under whose jurisdiction Ely fell until the establishment of the diocese of Ely in 1109), and the church dedicated to Etheldreda is referenced at this time.<sup>79</sup>

Although Histon itself is not mentioned any earlier than this, Impington appears in the *LE*, forming part of a substantial gift of estates by an ealdorman named Byrhtnoth to the abbey at Ely (the *LE* actually states that they were given to St Æthelthryth) in gratitude for the hospitality the abbey had shown him and his army on their way to confront the Vikings at Maldon in 991.<sup>80</sup>

It appears that at some time before the Conquest the land containing Histon and Impington was lost, as there is a later reference in the *LE* that William I decreed that it should be returned into Ely's ownership from Picot, the sheriff of Cambridge, along with a number of other estates.<sup>81</sup>

The dedication of the church at Histon to Æthelthryth is likely to be as a result of the gift of the land upon which it was located to the abbey at Ely by Byrhtnoth.

Miller's assertion regarding the apparent stability of Benedictine monasticism at Ely during Æthelred's reign is supported by the production of two key texts within which Æthelthryth plays a prominent role, evidence of a very early guild dedicated to her, and her inclusion in a number of ecclesiastical calendars and litanies. Up until this point, evidence of Æthelthryth's influence had been confined geographically to East Anglia (and principally, with only a few exceptions, Cambridgeshire), and mainly through Æthelwold's land acquisitions and the few subsequent parish church dedications. It is through the detail of these land transactions that the bishop's acumen as a negotiator and businessman can be seen. However, he also gained a reputation as a teacher and scholar, establishing Winchester, his bishopric, as a centre for the study and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>80</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 62, p. 134; Keynes, *Ely Abbey 672-1109*, p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 122, pp. 204-205. Picot was a particular thorn in the Ely monastic community's side and was the subject of the wrath of Æthelthryth for refusing to recognise her rights to the lands or to hand back those that he had taken from the foundation. As a result, he was banished from the area 'like the dust which the wind blows forth from the face of the Earth' (*'tanquam pulvis quem proicit ventus, a facie terre'*), see *ibid.*, Book II, chs. 131-132, pp. 210-213.

production of many important Anglo-Saxon texts,<sup>82</sup> and it is from Winchester that a textual tradition relating to St Æthelthryth emerges at around the turn of the millennium, including the first hagiographical account of her life since that of Bede nearly three centuries earlier. This text, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, along with a benedictional attributed to Æthelwold, serves to show in different ways that textual and illustrative portrayals of the saint, her characteristics, and her actions were used by the bishop to aid in the achievement of his goal of introducing and spreading the Rule of Benedict into England. Key to the overall success of his reforms was his ability to record and then disseminate the messages he was espousing to a wider audience, and these two very different texts produced at Winchester from this time appear to have been produced to fulfil this aim.

The earlier of the two texts dates from between 971 and 984, and is a benedictional that belonged to, and was commissioned by, Æthelwold.<sup>83</sup> The benedictional was produced at a time when this type of liturgical book was popular both in England and on the Continent, although Æthelwold's version stands out in that it is the first known example to include a comprehensive, beautifully illustrated set of introductory pages.<sup>84</sup> More than fifty per cent of the figures represented in the illustrations are saints, and within these, Æthelthryth takes pride of place, only ranking behind the Virgin Mary in importance. While she appears alongside several other virginal saints in a group illustration, she and Mary Magdalene are the only ones that can be specifically identified (from the inscriptions on the books they are holding in their hands) and that are portrayed with haloes (Figure 9). She is also one of only four saints

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<sup>82</sup> Michael Lapidge provides a detailed analysis of Æthelwold's accomplishments at Winchester in this regard, see Lapidge, *Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher*.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Deshman has written a comprehensive analysis of the content and history of the benedictional, and he notes that the dedication poem opens with the words 'A bishop, the great Æthelwold, whom the Lord made patron of Winchester, ordered a certain monk subject to him to write the present book', which dates it at the earliest from the time Æthelwold was at Winchester (963-984). The prominence of Æthelthryth in the benedictional suggests that it was written after Æthelwold's re-foundation of Ely, further narrowing the date range to between 971 and 984 (the latter year being that of Æthelwold's death). Robert E Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1995), pp. 148 & 260. The original manuscript is London, British Library, MS Add. 49598.

<sup>84</sup> Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold*, p. 3.

warranting full-page, individual images (the others are John the Baptist, St Benedict and St Swithun), and the only one where the text of their feast-day is adorned with a historiated initial letter, containing a depiction of Christ himself (Figures 10 and 11, below).<sup>85</sup>

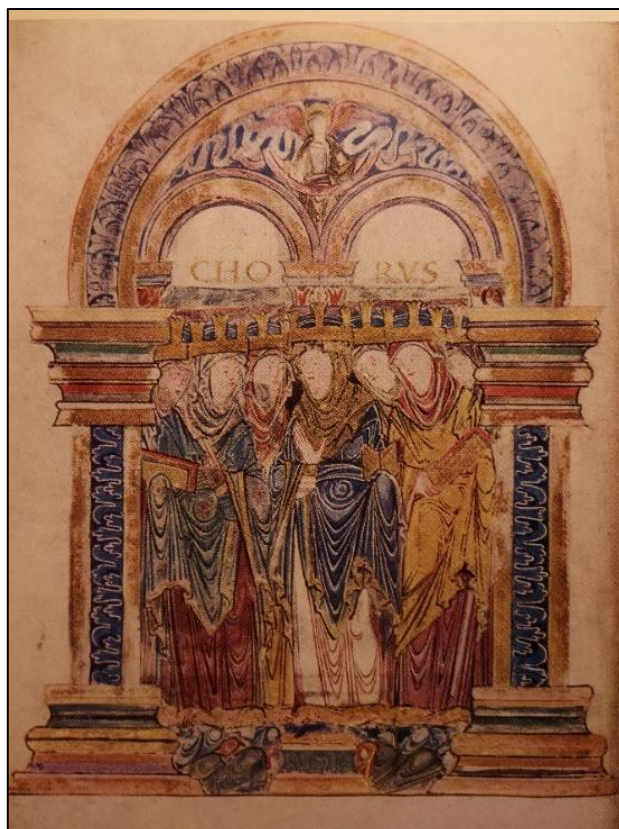


Figure 9. St Æthelthryth Represented within a Group of Female Saints.<sup>86</sup> She is on the left, while Mary Magdalene is in the centre.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-122.

<sup>86</sup> London, British Library, MS Add. 49598, f. 2r.



Figures 10 and 11. Full-Page Illustration of St Æthelthryth Holding a Book and Flowers (on the left) and the Historiated Initial Letter of the Text of her Feast-Day (right).<sup>87</sup>

The iconography, style, and detail of the illustrations of Æthelthryth have been interpreted by Robert Deshman as highlighting her imitation of the Virgin Mary,<sup>88</sup> clearly emphasising her virtuousness and chastity, a theme that is common across many of the texts of the Æthelthryth's life including that of Bede and the *LE*. However, there is also a subtler reinforcement of the importance of the link between royalty and the monastic movement that Æthelwold was establishing. King Edgar's queen, Ælfthryth, was a powerful figure in her own right and was accorded the title of special protector of England's nunneries in the *Regularis Concordia*,<sup>89</sup> while the *LE* mentions that she visited Ely and donated land jointly with her

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., ff. 90v and 91r.

<sup>88</sup> Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold*, p. 123 and pp. 150-152.

<sup>89</sup> Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 163.



husband.<sup>90</sup> The inclusion in the Benedictional in such a prominent way of Æthelthryth, a queen who became an abbess, could therefore be interpreted as a validating model for the role of Ælfthryth, a queen who took control of the nunneries.<sup>91</sup>

The Benedictional's author is named in the manuscript as Godeman, now identified as Æthelwold's chaplain at the Old Minster in Winchester,<sup>92</sup> and, while there appears to be no evidence that the Benedictional itself was copied or disseminated outside of Winchester, it was the forerunner of several texts to emulate its style, although usually with far less elaboration.<sup>93</sup> Æthelwold's Benedictional is the only one of these to include Æthelthryth's feast day, however, and this is probably an indication of the importance of Æthelthryth to Æthelwold specifically at the time of his reform of the East Anglian foundations. Despite the fact that there was only one copy produced and that it is likely it remained in Winchester until long after the Reformation,<sup>94</sup> the brilliance of the illumination and the script must have meant it would have made quite an impact when it was brought out to be read from on feast and saints' days. The illustrations and the text combined to convey to the audience the message that by following the example of the saints, they too could attain the goal of a heavenly life, and the prominence of Æthelthryth and her story highlighted the importance that Æthelwold attached to her as a role model for a chaste and virtuous existence, while also emphasising the significance of royal patronage.

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<sup>90</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, chs. 37 and 47, pp. 111 and 116.

<sup>91</sup> Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>93</sup> Two such examples are the Ramsey Benedictional (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Lat. 987) and a benedictional possibly commissioned for Ethelgar of Abingdon, a contemporary of Æthelwold (Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS Y.7). Colum P Hourihane, ed., *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2012), p. 90.

<sup>94</sup> The post-medieval history of the Benedictional is sketchy although Deshman notes that it probably remained at either Winchester cathedral or Hyde Abbey (the New Minster in Winchester) until the seventeenth century, see Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold*, p. 261. It reappears in the listing of the estate of Bishop Henry Compton, who was bishop of Oxford in 1674 and 1675, and then bishop of London until his death in 1713, and C E Wright has suggested that Compton could have been gifted the book by William Clark, Dean of Winchester cathedral, in c. 1670. (C E Wright, 'The Benedictional of St Ethelwold and Bishop Henry Compton', *The British Museum Quarterly*, 27 (1963), p. 4).



The second text, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, also originated at Winchester, although one of the extant copies provides evidence that the text was being disseminated to other foundations. Like the Benedictional it is instructional in nature, although very different in style, content, and intended audience. *Æthelwold's* biographers, Wulfstan and *Ælfric*, were also former students of his at Winchester and were prolific writers, and towards the very end of the tenth century, and prior to updating Wulfstan's *Life of Æthelwold*, *Ælfric* produced his collection of saints' lives which was one of the earliest examples of a hagiographic collection written in Old English.<sup>95</sup> It is a collection of forty sermons arranged for the church year commencing with Christmas, and comprising fifteen on general subjects, fourteen male saints' lives, seven female saints' lives (one of which is *Æthelthryth*), and three telling the lives of virginal married couples. It survives in four extant manuscripts, the best preserved, and earliest, of which is London, British Library, Cotton Julius E.vii, although, since it dates to between 1010 and 1020, it is not the original.<sup>96</sup> An inscription within it tells us that it was owned and used in the thirteenth century by the monks of Bury St Edmunds<sup>97</sup> (although it is more likely it was produced in Winchester) which provides us with clear evidence that *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* was being disseminated to a wider audience than that located only within *Æthelwold's* Winchester heartland. How widespread this dissemination was, however, has been disputed by Mechthild Gretsch who says that the work's

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<sup>95</sup> The date range for its completion can be fixed with some degree of certainty to between 994 and 998. It is the third in a series of three homilies, the second of which was not completed until 994 at the earliest, see Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 158. Similarly, the *terminus anti quem* is governed by the year of the death of *Æthelweard*, ealdorman of the western provinces, to whom the collection was dedicated, and in the preface, *Ælfric* 'humbly greeteth' ('*gret eadmodlice*') *Æthelweard*, suggesting that he was still alive at the time the collection was completed, Walter W Skeat, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* (London, 1881), Preface, pp. 4 and 5.

<sup>96</sup> For the date of the manuscript, see Neil Ripley Ker, ed., *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 206-207. Joyce Hill has undertaken further work on the provenance and relationship of the manuscripts to each other, and has concluded that Julius E.vii, while probably being the forerunner of the other extant documents, is not necessarily completely representative of the original, and for this reason warns of the dangers of reading too much into their dissemination patterns, see Joyce Hill, 'The Dissemination of *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*: A Preliminary Survey', in P. E. Szarmach, ed., *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts* (Albany, New York, 1996), pp. 236 & 252. Skeat's 1881 translation is based upon Julius E.vii and is the version referenced within this thesis (subsequently cited as '*Ælfric*').

<sup>97</sup> '*Liber sancti Ædmundi regis [et] martyris*', London, British Library, Cotton Julius E.vii, f. 3r.

popularity would have been limited since Ælfric's homiletic style was unknown in Europe up to this point, and was not to be adopted for some considerable time after the *Lives of Saints*' completion.<sup>98</sup> While this assertion appears to be backed up by the small number of manuscripts that have survived, it would also not be inconceivable that copies would have been introduced to the foundations that Æthelwold, Ælfric's tutor, had been responsible for reforming, which would have made Ælfric's work accessible to monastic communities across East Anglia and the south of England. Æthelwold's reputation as a teacher and an advocate of well-stocked libraries is well-documented,<sup>99</sup> and even after his death procuring copies of recent scholarly works would have been something for which the abbots of his monasteries would have been responsible. Of the three other extant copies of the manuscript, two were severely damaged by fire in the eighteenth century and so their provenance has proved impossible to determine,<sup>100</sup> while the final one (Cambridge, University Library li. 1. 33) dates from almost a century after Julius E.vii, from which, according to Hill, it is textually descended, although again the place of its origin has not been ascertained.<sup>101</sup>

Ælfric appears to have chosen the subjects of his *Lives of Saints* very carefully, identifying saints and feast days that were celebrated by and therefore familiar to a monastic audience. In the preface, part of which is in Latin and part of which is in Old English, he outlines the reasons for his choices, saying '... it has now pleased me to set forth, in this book, the Passions as well as the Lives of those saints whom not the vulgar, but the monks, honour by special services', and that 'now it has seemed good to us that we should write this book concerning the suffering and lives

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<sup>98</sup> Gretsich, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, p. 246.

<sup>99</sup> See, for instance, Michael Lapidge's study of Æthelwold's pedagogical achievements, Lapidge, *Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher*, pp. 104-110.

<sup>100</sup> London, British Library, Cotton Otho B.x and London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius D.xvii, dated by Ker to the early and mid-part of the eleventh century respectively, were both victims of the fire that swept through the Cotton collection in 1731. For the dating evidence, see Ker, ed., *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, pp. 224 & 292 respectively.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 23; Hill, *The Dissemination of Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, p. 237.

of the Saints whom monks in their offices honour amongst themselves.<sup>102</sup> The preface also contains a dedication to two lay noblemen, Æthelweard and Æthelmær, who, according to Ælfric, specifically requested the collection to be written in English, and these three statements *in toto* have resulted in a scholarly consensus of opinion that the principal audience for the work was a combination of the monastic community and the lay aristocracy.<sup>103</sup>

Ælfric's decision to write the *Lives of Saints* in English is worthy of some scrutiny and was probably made to enhance the use of the language among his target readership. The work was, as mentioned previously, a very early example of an Old English hagiography, and there are two principal reasons why he would have chosen English over Latin (notwithstanding the fact that he was apparently asked to write in this way by his two patrons). He was either intending to promulgate the use of English from a scholarly perspective, to try to bring its use into line with that of Latin for an educated audience, as per Mechthild Gretsch's thinking,<sup>104</sup> or, as Elaine Treharne has postulated, he was using the language for more principled reasons, to enable the voice of the 'silenced English', as she calls them, to be heard.<sup>105</sup> In the preface of the *Lives*, Ælfric tells us, in pleasingly simple terms, that 'We say nothing new in this book, because it has stood written down long since in Latin books, though lay-men knew it not',<sup>106</sup> and this statement, along with his dislike of ostentation and complex rhetoric,<sup>107</sup> suggests that the

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<sup>102</sup> '... placuit nobis in isto codicello ordinare passiones etiam uel uitas sanctorum illorum quos non uulgi sed coenobite officiis uenerantur', Ælfric, p. 2, and 'Nu ge-wearð us þæt we þas bōc be þæra halgena ðrowungum and life . gedihton þe mynster-menn mid heora þenungum betwux him wurðiað', *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> See Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 125; Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, p. 158; James Hurt, *Ælfric* (New York, 1972), p. 35; and Helen Gittos, 'The Audience for Old English Texts: Ælfric, Rhetoric and 'the Edification of the Simple'', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 43 (2014), p. 236.

<sup>104</sup> Gretsch states that the Anglo-Saxons' use of English showed 'an astonishing confidence in the potential of the vernacular to be developed as a medium for scholarly and religious discourse on a par with Latin', Mechthild Gretsch, 'Winchester Vocabulary and Standard Old English: the Vernacular in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester*, 83 (2001), p. 87.

<sup>105</sup> Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020-1220* (Oxford, 2012), p. 187. She specifically refers to Ælfric's homilies when she calls English the 'language of salvation'.

<sup>106</sup> 'Ne secge we nān þincg niwes on þissere gesetnysse . forþan ðe hit stod gefyrn awriten on ledenbocum þeah þe þa læwedan men þæt nyston.' Ælfric, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> Lapidge says that this was in stark contrast to Æthelwold's more obscure linguistic preferences, Lapidge, *Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher*, p. 108.

former premise is more likely, and that his aims in translating the *Lives of Saints* into English were more pedagogical than ideological.

Gretsch has postulated that Ælfric was involved in the composition of Æthelwold's Benedictional while at Winchester, and that this could have influenced his choice of subjects for the *Lives of Saints* twenty years later,<sup>108</sup> and the presence of Æthelthryth in both works lends weight to this theory. We have seen how much of a prominent figure she is within the Benedictional, and she is also unusual in comparison to the other female saints within Ælfric's *Lives*. Of the seven female saints whose lives he describes, Æthelthryth is the only one that was not martyred, and so the emphasis is far more on her virginal state than the manner of her death, which is the case for the others. Ælfric's account was based on Bede's original *Life* (Ælfric actually states this)<sup>109</sup> which means that approximately half of the *Life* actually took place after Æthelthryth's death, describing the translation of her relics by her sister, Seaxburh, and the miracles that took place at the tomb when it was opened. As a result, at face value, Bede's message of the rewards for a chaste life that forgoes the trappings of wealth and belongings and which leads to a place in Heaven were being reiterated by Ælfric. However, as an addendum to the story of Æthelthryth, the final fifteen lines of Ælfric's *Life* recite the tale of athane who, after fathering three sons, spent the remaining thirty years of his life in a chaste marriage, before entering a monastery where he stayed until his death.<sup>110</sup> The inclusion of this passage within the story of Æthelthryth has been interpreted from a feminist perspective by historians such as Gwen Griffiths and Catherine Karkov as symptomatic of the waning power of women within the Church in the tenth century,<sup>111</sup> in contrast to the time when Æthelthryth was alive (and when Bede was writing),

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<sup>108</sup> Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>109</sup> 'Nu cwæð se halga beda þe þas boc gesette ...', Ælfric, p. 432.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 440.

<sup>111</sup> See Gwen Griffiths, 'Reading Ælfric's Saint Æthelthryth as a Woman', *Parergon*, 10 (1992), pp. 35-43 and Catherine E Karkov, 'The Body of St Æthelthryth: Desire, Conversion and Reform in Anglo-Saxon England', in M. Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 398-399.

when female figures had a much more equal status to men in religious foundations.<sup>112</sup> In particular, Griffiths sees Ælfric's version of Æthelthryth's *Life* as a reflection of the saint's passiveness and subordination, describing her as 'powerless and good',<sup>113</sup> and thus needing the benefit of a male role model to ensure that his (Ælfric's) principally male audience fully appreciated the message he was trying to convey.

While it is evident that male saints have a greater overall presence within Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, (there are double the number), if, as has been suggested, the female saints were so lacking in influence then it is questionable as to why Ælfric would have included them at all. Æthelwold clearly had believed that Æthelthryth's relics and story were a powerful political tool which he had used to good effect in achieving his goal of reforming the monasteries of East Anglia, and in particular the re-foundation of Ely, and it is highly likely that Ælfric would have been aware of this when choosing who to include in his *Lives*. Æthelthryth's prominent position in Æthelwold's Benedictional – the composition of which Ælfric could have been involved in – means that her story would have had a widespread audience, at least in the areas that the Benedictine Rule was prevalent. The combination of Æthelthryth's virginity and celibacy along with her royal heritage and decisiveness in punishing those who wronged her (such as the Ely priest and monastic convert Ælfhelm) give the impression of a saint who was far from powerless, and whose example would have been of great benefit to the reformers of tenth- and eleventh-century East Anglia.

The two texts provide compelling evidence that the use of Æthelthryth as a role model within the monastic community of East Anglia was becoming established by the early decades of the eleventh century, and the establishment of a guild in Cambridge in the late tenth or early eleventh century is further reinforcement of this. The eleventh-century ordinances of this, the

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<sup>112</sup> Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 81-82 & pp. 174-175.

<sup>113</sup> Griffiths, 'Reading Ælfric's Saint Æthelthryth as a Woman', p. 39.

Thanes' Guild of Cambridge, stated that, should a gild-brother have died, the surviving members should 'contribute two pence to the alms, and thereof bring what is fitting to St Æpeldrype'.<sup>114</sup> This stipulation, that members of the guild should have made reparations to their chosen saint, provides a succinct illustration of the way that medieval social guilds acted on behalf of their membership and in the name of the saint they had selected as their patron. The Thanes' Guild is one of the earliest recorded in England, although there are several other, later guilds with links to Æthelthryth dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when their existence was far more ubiquitous. New members swore an oath to the patron saint which obligated them to perform certain undertakings, among which were the provision of charity and support to fellow members, commemoration of those who had died, and collective worship, especially in regard to the feast day of their respective saint.<sup>115</sup> The decision on the choice of patron saint was an important one, as can be seen by the volume of references to feast days that are present in guilds' statutes, and the variety of celebrations that were stipulated to take place on these days. Candles were lit to stand on the altars of churches, in chapels, and in guild-halls on feast days, and the provision of lights and wax became an important part of the guilds' activities – Barbara Hanawalt thought this so significant that her 1984 article on parish guilds is entitled 'Keepers of the Lights'<sup>116</sup> – with in some cases the specific type of candle for a given occasion being listed.<sup>117</sup> There are records of lavish feasts and parades being laid on for saints' days,<sup>118</sup> and in some

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<sup>114</sup> 'ælc sceote twegen pænegas to þære ælmessan· man þærof gebrynge þ gerise æt Sce Æpeldrype', Benjamin Thorpe, ed., *Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici: A Collection of English Charters, from the Reign of King Æthelberht of Kent, to that of William the Conqueror* (London, 1865), p. 611.

<sup>115</sup> Virginia R Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire c. 1350-1558* (Woodbridge, 1996), p. 15.

<sup>116</sup> Barbara A Hanawalt, 'Keepers of the Lights: Late Medieval Parish Gilds', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 14 (1984), p. 21; Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside*, pp. 66-68.

<sup>117</sup> Gild candles, soul candles for funerals, square altar candles, and Judas candles have all been mentioned within the statutes, see Barbara A Hanawalt and Ben R McRee, 'The Guilds of Homo Prudens in Late Medieval England', *Continuity and Change*, 7 (1992), p. 28.

<sup>118</sup> In the village of Bardwell, members processed to the local parish church, and after mass was said, attended a feast for up to one hundred and fifty local people, *ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

locations miracle plays were performed or readings from the Bible or from hagiographical works were given.<sup>119</sup>

The statutes of the Thanes' Guild of Cambridge show that it was in existence very early in the eleventh century and Bainbridge has dated its foundation to as early as the late tenth century.<sup>120</sup> It is one of only five that are referred to in the sources as active before 1100, the others being Abbotsbury in Dorset, Bedwyn in Wiltshire, and two in Exeter,<sup>121</sup> but the Cambridge guild predates them all and is seen as the forerunner of the religious guilds that followed.<sup>122</sup> Prior to this, local fraternities had been primarily focused on co-operation between groups of families from similar trades and crafts with a view to spreading the risks associated with poor economic circumstances, and to sharing in the benefits when conditions were better. These fraternities had formed no particular religious associations, and therefore the naming of Æthelthryth as the Cambridge guild's patron represented a new development in the way that they operated. Natalie Fryde suggests that the incorporation of this religious aspect represented a natural progression in guilds' development as social and community organisations.<sup>123</sup>

A combination of factors contributed to the formation of the Cambridge guild which together could explain its early foundation date. The guild drew its members from the wealthy and the elite of the residents in and around Cambridge: the scale of charges and fines for which members could be liable, and the level of compensation paid to the families of deceased gild-

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<sup>119</sup> Walford talks of the performative aspect of feast days, see Walford, *Gilds*, p. 9, while Westlake identifies instances where texts were read aloud, and specifically points to *Ælfric*, compiled in the tenth century but subsequently widely copied and circulated, as a volume from which the readings could have been taken, see Herbert Francis Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediæval England* (London, 1919), pp. 122-123. Æthelthryth is one of the saints whose *Life* appears in *Ælfric*.

<sup>120</sup> Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside*, p. 33.

<sup>121</sup> Gervase Rosser, 'The Anglo-Saxon Gilds', in J. Blair, ed., *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition 950-1200* (Oxford, 1988), p. 31.

<sup>122</sup> Westlake, *Parish Gilds*, p. 5.

<sup>123</sup> Natalie Fryde, 'Gilds in England before the Black Death', *Vorträge und Forschung*, 29 (1985), pp. 217-218.

brothers, as laid out in the statutes, would have precluded the less well-off from joining. The guild's wealth and membership provided it with local influence in what was one of the most important towns in probably the richest region of the country at the time, and an association with an equally powerful saint would have only served to reinforce its authority. There were two local saints with the renown that would have been suitable for the Cambridge guild-members: Ely's St Æthelthryth, whose shrine was less than a day's journey away, and St Edmund at Bury, slightly further afield.

The statutes of the guild stated that members should swear an oath of fidelity on the relics of the saint themselves, and so a shrine that was relatively easy to visit was an important consideration for the members.<sup>124</sup> The choice of Æthelthryth over Edmund could well have been linked to the Benedictine Reforms that had taken place shortly before the guild's formation. The reform of Ely took place in 970, and so the monastery was increasing its influence in East Anglia and promoting the relics of Æthelthryth at a similar time to when the Cambridge guild was being set up. The monastery at Bury St Edmunds did not start to grow in prominence in the region until a half-century later, and so the choice of Æthelthryth as the pre-eminent local saint of the time was a relatively simple one. Therefore, the choice of her as the patron for the Cambridge guild, whose aspirations were to utilise its wealth and membership to shape the local economic, political, and religious landscape, was one that would have matched their ambitions entirely.

### **The Widening of the Influence of Æthelthryth's Cult outside East Anglia**

The scriptorium at Winchester that produced both Æthelwold's *Benedictional* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* was also the source of other texts in the eleventh century that saw knowledge of

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<sup>124</sup> 'þ ælc oþrum aþ on haligdome sealed soþre heldrædenne for Gode and for worulde', Thorpe, ed., *Diplomaterium*, p. 610.



Æthelthryth's cult extend beyond East Anglia. References to Æthelthryth begin to appear in ecclesiastical calendars and litanies dating from this period, sometimes multiple times from one location, and with a geographical and temporal spread that encompassed the Benedictine foundations of southern and eastern England, and into the Midlands. Until now, ecclesiastical calendars and litanies have been the least-analysed sources for evidence of St Æthelthryth, and yet paradoxically they contain the greatest number of examples of her of any other source discussed in this thesis, whether textual or material. General scholarship on the subject of ecclesiastical calendars is quite sparse, with the earliest partial list of medieval examples drawn up by Robert Hampson in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>125</sup> It was not until Francis Wormald in the 1930s produced a collation of all of the known Anglo-Saxon examples, however, that any comprehensive study was available.<sup>126</sup> He followed this up a few years later with a similar work (which was actually published as two volumes) for calendars produced after 1100.<sup>127</sup> The topic was not subsequently addressed in any great depth until 2008, whereupon Wormald's first volume was revisited by Rebecca Rushforth. She tabulated the calendars with the aim of focusing on the saints mentioned in the manuscripts identified earlier by Wormald, and in doing so documented a small number of calendars that had come to light in the intervening period.<sup>128</sup> No similar exercise has been undertaken on the post-1100 calendars, and therefore Wormald's 1940s volumes are the only available collated source for these.

When the total number of pre-1100 calendars containing references to Æthelthryth is considered, her appearance in the Munich calendar of the eighth century described in Chapter One of this thesis seems anomalous. Analysis of this fragment and its links with the

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<sup>125</sup> See Robert T Hampson, *Medii Ævi Kalendarium: or, Dates, Charters, and Customs of the Middle Ages*, (London, 1841), vols. 1 and 2.

<sup>126</sup> Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars Before A.D. 1100*.

<sup>127</sup> Francis Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars After A.D. 1100, vol. 1, Abbotsbury - Durham* (London, 1939) and Francis Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars After A.D. 1100, vol. 2, Ely - St. Neots* (London, 1946).

<sup>128</sup> Rushforth, *Saints in English Kalendars Before A.D. 1100*.

Northumbrian missionary bishops' journeys to Francia suggests that she would, however, have been included in other contemporary calendars, now lost or still undiscovered.<sup>129</sup> This said, charting the total number of calendars containing celebrations of Æthelthryth's feast days plainly highlights the more than two-hundred-year gap between the collation of the Munich calendar and the next earliest-known examples from the late tenth century. From this time, production of the calendars increased throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.

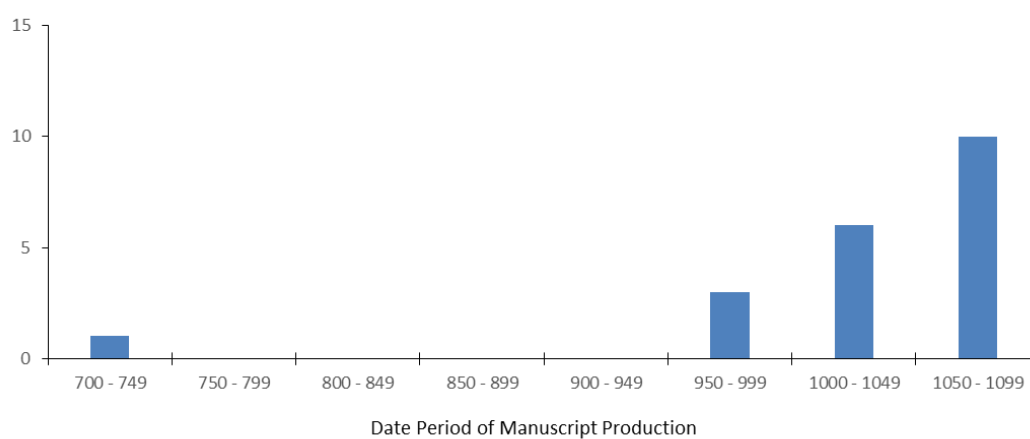


Figure 12. Pre-1100 Manuscript Production of Calendars Containing Entries for St Æthelthryth.

The calendars were used as a record of saints' feast days and other anniversaries or events that the monastic community needed to remember, and the inclusion of a particular saint on their feast day in an institution's calendar is indicative that that saint's life was celebrated in some way, usually through the reading of some or all of their hagiography. It can thus be inferred that the monastery would also have had access to compendia of saints' lives, such as Bede's *Martyrologium* from the eighth century, Ælfric's tenth-century *Lives of Saints*, or the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*. Æthelthryth's hagiography appears in all three of these.

<sup>129</sup> See above, ch. 1, pp. 44-49.

By 1016 Æthelthryth featured in ecclesiastical calendars that originated not only from Winchester, but also from Canterbury and from Wilton Abbey in Wiltshire. The ethos of writing and learning that was introduced at Winchester by Bishop Æthelwold in the second half of the tenth century, and which continued after the Norman Conquest, is evident from the number of calendars that continued to be produced there, with three further examples from the middle of the eleventh century still extant.<sup>130</sup> All four Winchester calendars contain entries for both the death and translation of Æthelthryth, a reflection of the importance of Ely and Æthelthryth to the Benedictine bishop. By the time of the Norman Conquest, the number of individual locations producing calendars had grown from three to nine, including Salisbury, Sherborne, and Glastonbury in the southwest of England, Leominster and Worcester in the Midlands, and Ramsey in East Anglia. These institutions were all Benedictine foundations, reformed through the actions of Æthelwold, Dunstan, and Oswald in the second half of the previous century, and it is therefore likely that their calendars were copied from or based on those of the Winchester scriptorium. The spread of the textual tradition of Æthelthryth throughout the Benedictine foundations of the mid-eleventh century is clearly evident from the map of Ely's influence by the time of the Norman Conquest, Figure 13, below.

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<sup>130</sup> The calendars are contained in the following manuscripts: London, British Library, Cotton Titus D.xvii; Cambridge University, Trinity College, MS R.15.32; London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius E.xviii; and Arundel Cathedral Library, MS 60. For detail on the dating of these manuscripts, see Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars Before A.D. 1100*, pp. 141-153.

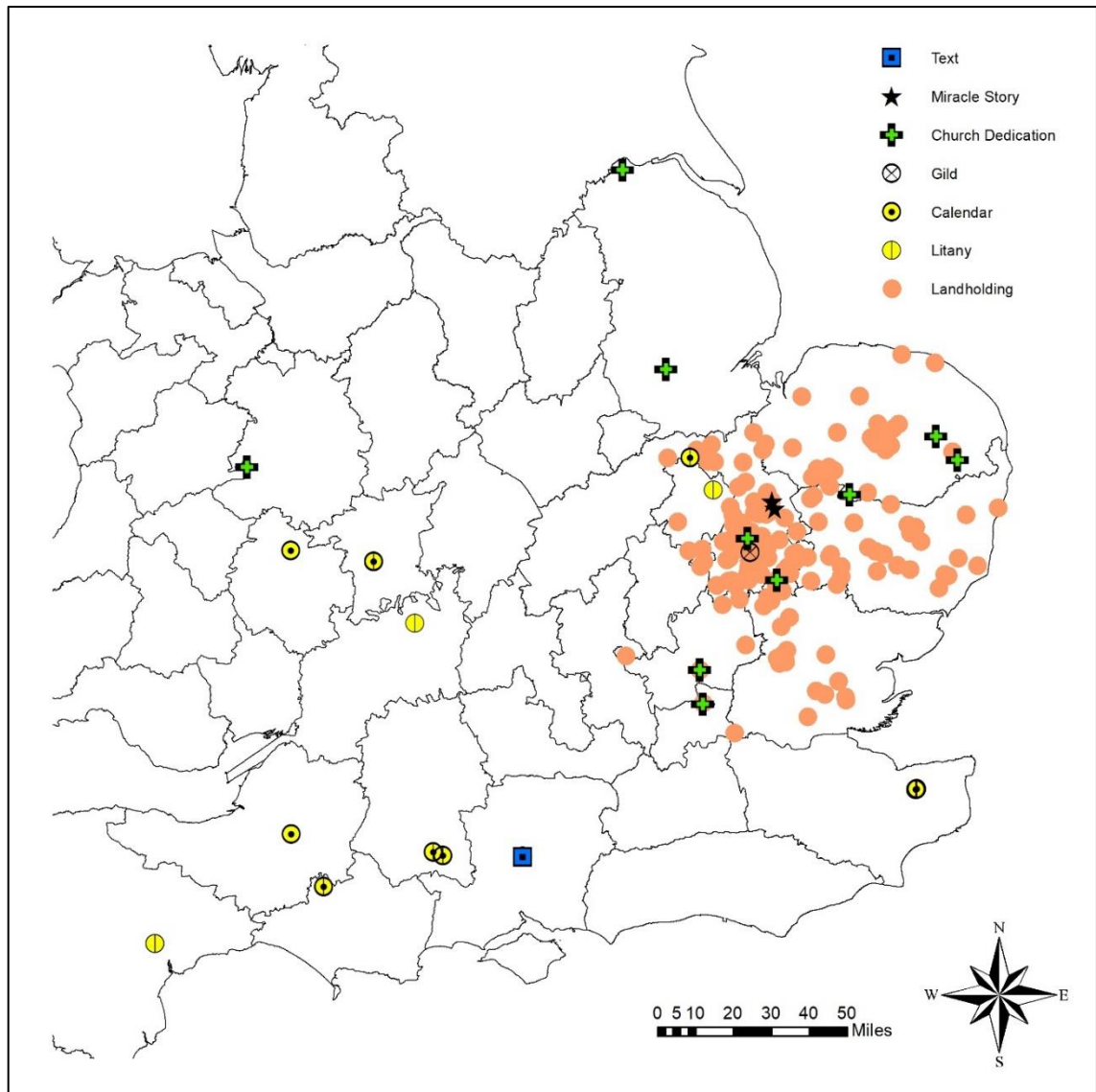


Figure 13. The Extent of Ely's Influence at the Time of the Norman Conquest.

While calendars reflected the dates on which specific saints would have been commemorated, litanies were used for a range of ceremonies and liturgical offices throughout the year. They took the form of a series of petitions made during the service by the celebrant and by the congregation to the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, apostles, martyrs, and saints, recited in a strict hierarchical order. Ceremonies where the litany would have been recited included the dedication of a church, the ordination of a monk, during a visit to a sick or dying monk, and as a

request for intercession on holy days such as Holy Saturday and Pentecost.<sup>131</sup> As well as public intercession, litanies were also a feature of private devotion, and so have been found within personal prayer books and Books of Hours.<sup>132</sup> The lists of saints were extensive, and in some cases could number more than two hundred, and therefore the inclusion of one particular saint's name is not as indicative of that saint's influence or the existence of a cult as a calendar entry would be. However, the saints that were included in the litanies were by no means the same in every location, and so an examination of the variety of saints' names contained within them still enables conclusions to be drawn from their analysis. The relatively large volume of entries in the litanies provide plenty of material from which geographical and chronological patterns can be investigated. However, if anything, scholarly investigation of them has been sparser than that of the calendars. We are therefore reliant upon Michael Lapidge's 1991 volume that outlines the forms the litany could have taken, while also collating in one place all of the identified Anglo-Saxon manuscripts containing litanies, much as Wormald did for the calendar information.

The number of litanies that contained prayers for Æthelthryth grew steadily throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, totalling thirty by the time of the Norman Conquest, originating in many of the same foundations as those with calendars celebrating Æthelthryth's feast days. These represent almost half of the litanies catalogued by Lapidge, providing an indication of the popularity of Æthelthryth as a saint whose invocation was being regularly requested. Lapidge's pre-1100 data allows us to see exactly how popular she was, however, since he has included as an appendix tables that list every saint mentioned within the manuscripts he analysed, allowing a view to be compiled showing the comparative number of occurrences of the saints included within them.<sup>133</sup> There are 655 individual saints named within the sixty-one litanies Lapidge

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<sup>131</sup> Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints* (London, 1991), pp. 43-45.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix 1, pp. 306-324.

catalogued, with 4,358 entries in total (saints regularly appeared multiple times in the same litany). Æthelthryth is the 45<sup>th</sup> most prolific saint in the list, so well within the top ten per cent of all the saints listed, with twenty-six entries in twenty-two manuscripts.

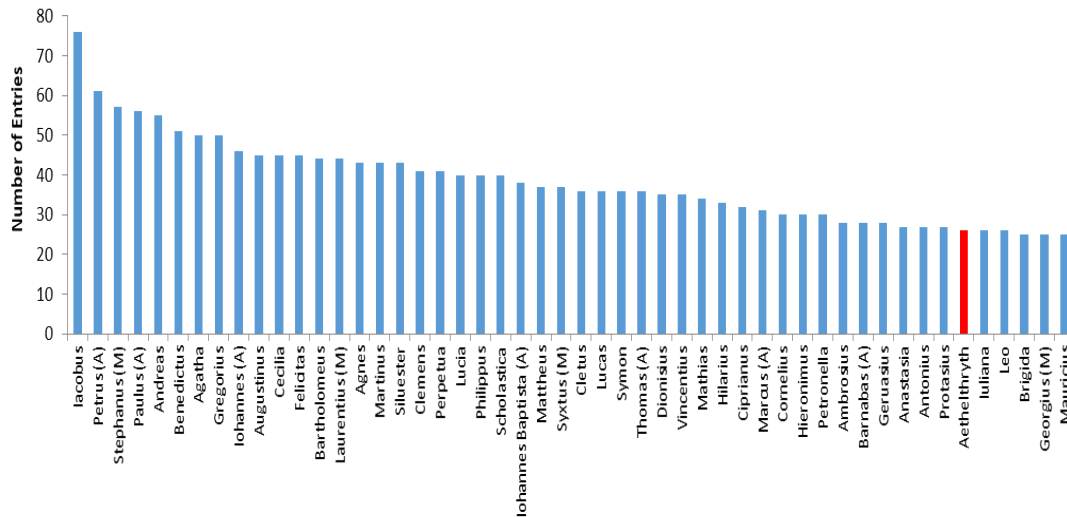


Figure 14. The Fifty Most Prolific Saints Appearing in Pre-1100 Litanies.<sup>134</sup>

(Suffix A identifies apostles, M identifies martyrs).

This chart shows that Æthelthryth was among the most venerated of all Anglo-Saxon saints, and she was in fact the most prolific of the English saints of the time. Those saints with more entries than her include seven of the twelve apostles (these are the only ones annotated as such in the entire list), a number of martyrs, and several female non-English saints, including St Agatha, St Cecilia, and St Agnes. Within the litanies themselves, Æthelthryth's name tended to appear towards the end of the lists of saints, which seems slightly at odds when compared to the number of entries she had. However, when considered together, the geographical, chronological, and numerical data from the litanies paint a picture of a saint whose name was being invoked in monastic institutions across the country, but especially towards the south and

<sup>134</sup> After *ibid.*, Appendix 1, pp. 306-324.

primarily within the Benedictine foundations.

## **Conclusion**

The Danish incursions dealt a severe blow to the community at Ely and recovery from its effects took time, with the foundation's influence increasing only slowly over the following century through the acquisition of a small number of pieces of land, mainly in Cambridgeshire.

However, in 970, the abbey was re-founded by Bishop Æthelwold as a Benedictine institution, effected in conjunction with a rapid expansion in the landholdings of Ely and through the promotion of Ely's principal saint throughout East Anglia and subsequently across the south of England. Æthelwold was a great admirer of Æthelthryth and was not afraid to use her life story, characteristics, and reputation to help him achieve his objective of introducing the Rule of St Benedict into an increasing number of southern and eastern monasteries. Through the introduction of a philosophy of education and writing and the establishment of a scriptorium at his abbey in Winchester, he was able to instigate a textual tradition which spread the story of Æthelthryth and her example through the network of Benedictine foundations in the south of England.

Before 970, the progress of the foundation at Ely appears to have stagnated following the Viking raids, although closer inspection of the evidence reveals that in the two decades prior to Æthelwold's re-founding of the monastery, Æthelthryth's name and example were being used to lay the building blocks for the momentous events that were to follow. The introduction of Wulfstan of Dalham as one of Ely's – and Æthelthryth's – major benefactors is an indication of how important the patronage of the king and influential Anglo-Saxon landowners was to the success of the reforms at Ely. Wulfstan brought with him royal endorsement through his links with the English crown, but also a local East Anglian focus that would have proved very valuable in negotiating the complex and sometimes volatile regional politics of the time. The initial land

transaction at Stonea and the miracle collection telling of the monk Ælfhelm also point to the beginning of an interest in the religious activity at Ely, and specifically that relating to Æthelthryth, in the decades before the reforms. This concurs with the opinion of Andrew Wareham, who includes the foundation at Ely in what he refers to as a mid-950s 'programme of religious and cultural renewal',<sup>135</sup> and suggests a model of reform that was more evolutionary than revolutionary, leading up to the abbey's re-founding in 970, and continuing as a process of consolidation for several decades afterwards.

The patterns of landholding acquisitions highlight the rapid expansion of the abbey's power subsequent to the re-founding and throughout Edgar's reign, during which activity was mostly restricted to Cambridgeshire, followed by the period of consolidation, within which the number of transactions taking place outside of Ely's county far outweighed those closer to home. This appears to be a change of strategy that enabled Ely to cement its newly-found position as one of the most powerful institutions in East Anglia, while at the same time changing the focus of land acquisition away from royal backing by a supportive king, Edgar, to a reliance on the donations of wealthy regional patrons. Whether this shift in emphasis was planned or forced upon Æthelwold as a result of the death of Edgar is debatable, but the increase in disputes evident during the reign of the two subsequent monarchs has demonstrated that, if Ely's success was to continue, a slightly different direction would have had to be taken.

At the same time as the focus of Ely's landholding acquisitions moved outwards from Ely, Æthelwold's strategy of using the relics and power of Æthelthryth as a medium through which the message of reform was projected also shifted into a higher gear. The production of the two texts from Winchester either side of the millennium were a demonstration of the bishop's calculated use of hagiography to paint a positive picture of Benedictine monasticism that starkly

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<sup>135</sup> Andrew Wareham, *Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 44.



opposed his portrayal of the situation prior to the reforms. The 'golden age' of the Rule of St Benedict had been ushered in, using the Bedan values of humility and chastity as its basis, and with Æthelthryth the exemplar who brought Bede's codes of behaviour to life for the newly installed monks. Æthelthryth was an ideal role model, since, at the same time as demonstrating the benefits of the Benedictine way of life, her capacity for retribution also very clearly laid out the consequences of non-conformity. This was by no means a one-sided relationship, however, since Æthelwold's focus on the saint as the medium for his ideological message resulted in the promotion of her shrine and cult to a geographically much greater audience than otherwise would have been possible. The transmission of texts, in this case principally Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, and the production and dissemination of calendars containing entries for Æthelthryth into the Benedictine foundations meant that the monastic community were increasingly exposed to Æthelthryth's life and actions.

By the time of the Norman Conquest, the abbey at Ely owned land across a significant portion of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, and into Essex and Hertfordshire, and Æthelthryth's feast day was being commemorated in monastic institutions as far from Ely as Canterbury and Exeter in the south, and Leominster and Worcester towards the west. Using this dual approach of land purchase, which was placed into the custodianship of Æthelthryth thus directly increasing her sphere of influence, and the message portrayed through his interpretation of Æthelthryth's character, Æthelwold was able to reinvent Ely, turning the foundation into an East Anglian powerbase which, according to Miller, ultimately came to control land in more than two hundred villages.<sup>136</sup> Consequently, by the time that William I took the English throne, Æthelthryth's name could be quoted alongside St Edmund and St Cuthbert as one of the most well-known and venerated saints of the period.

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<sup>136</sup> Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 16.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **1066 TO 1173 – THE CREATION OF A BISHOPRIC AND A TEXTUAL LEGACY**

In contrast to the picture of Ely in the middle of the eleventh century as a successful, land-owning institution that had been rejuvenated by the Benedictine Reforms, the foundation's position in the years immediately following the Norman Conquest quickly turned into one of isolation and conflict. This was a period of instability for Ely, not least because the Lincolnshire rebel Hereward the Wake used the abbey as his stronghold in his struggle against William I which led to the Siege of Ely during 1070 and 1071. The abbey's opposition to William occurred at the same time as what can only be described as an opportunist land-grab by Norman barons and noblemen that severely diminished the landholdings of the foundation. This meant that the monastic community at Ely found itself both physically and metaphorically isolated from the rest of the country. The Isle of Ely, surrounded by the water of the Fens, was geographically extremely difficult to approach, while Hereward's actions against William meant that Ely was one of the few remaining strongholds of the resistance against the Norman invasion.<sup>1</sup> The figure of St Æthelthryth played an important role for both sides during and after the siege. Hereward saw her as safeguarding the community against the forces of the Conqueror while at the same time using the presence of her remains at Ely as the focus of his defence of the abbey – in his eyes she was there both to protect and to be protected. However, after William's almost-inevitable victory over the rebels, the king was surprisingly deferential to her shrine, possibly pre-empting any retributive action he believed may have come from either the saint herself or the people he had so recently subjugated. William was thus using the saint's

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Rex, *The English Resistance: The Underground War Against the Normans* (Stroud, 2014), pp. 142-143.

influence as a way of deflecting any further rebellious activity against him, while at the same time establishing his authority over the abbey by installing its first Norman abbot.

This appointment was the first in a sequence of events which ultimately resulted in the writing of the *LE* in the latter half of the twelfth century. Although each of the events leading up to the *LE*'s production is significant in its own right, by viewing them holistically it can be seen that the *LE* was the culmination of a political and ecclesiastical strategy which had the aim of establishing and cementing Ely's position as arguably the most powerful foundation in East Anglia. This was a plan that was initiated as a result of the Norman Conquest, that incorporated the writing of not one but two hagiographies of St Æthelthryth (aside from the one that appears in the *LE* itself), and that also resulted in the translation of the saint's relics in 1106 and the creation of the diocese and bishopric of Ely three years later. During the earlier part of this period, the foundation at Ely found itself to be at the epicentre of Hereward's rebellion against William the Conqueror, was subjected to the appointment of a succession of Norman abbots and ultimately, its first bishop, and was also involved in a number of legal struggles relating to its lands and properties. The events that culminated in the writing of the *LE* will be shown to be a co-ordinated response to those threats to the foundation's success and prosperity, with the figure of Æthelthryth the central pillar upon which this response was based.

The circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Ely diocese and those that influenced the community at Ely to compile the *LE* have been covered on a piecemeal basis by various historians and scholars, but these analyses only go part way to explaining the significance of the events that occurred prior to the writing of the *LE*. Consequently, they do not fully recognise the relationships between these events or the co-ordinated efforts of the abbots and the first bishop which enabled the Ely foundation to progress from a besieged and vulnerable institution

to one of the richest in England.<sup>2</sup> Of the principal scholarship, Keynes has used the *LE* and the charters of William I to give a clear historical account of the fortunes of Ely, but does not acknowledge the significance of the compilation of the two *vitae* and the *miracula* that preceded the *LE*, which has had the effect of reducing the contribution of the saint herself.<sup>3</sup> Both Crosby and Miller concentrate very much on the wealth and landholding of the foundation to illustrate the relative achievements of the Norman ecclesiastical appointees, but do not adequately recognise the impact that the combination of saintly and political influence had on creating and increasing that wealth.<sup>4</sup> Ridyard's focus, on the other hand, is specifically the royal cult at Ely, and therefore the figure of Æthelthryth is rightly positioned at the front and centre of the monastery's response to the upheaval of the Conquest and its aftermath. Despite this, however, the contributions of the work of Goscelin and Gregory are not recognised; Goscelin is mentioned only once with respect to Ely, and Gregory's *vita* is listed as a source for the *LE*, but no detail surrounding the reasons for it being commissioned are given.<sup>5</sup>

That the *LE* was a text that was written with a purpose in mind is evident from the timing of its production, its complexity, and its organisation. The combination of hagiography, history, and cartulary in one document was an innovation that had not been seen prior to the production of the Ely text. It was completed in or around 1173, and this choice of date for the *LE*'s production was no accident. It coincided with both the five-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Ely by Æthelthryth and the year of the canonisation of Thomas Becket, the former archbishop of Canterbury who had been martyred three years earlier. The monastic community at Ely needed both to consolidate its position as a dominant ecclesiastical force in East Anglia and to safeguard itself from any future legal challenges of the type that had reduced its landholdings so severely

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<sup>2</sup> Thompson and Stevens, 'Gregory of Ely', p. 336. Gregory also describes the wealth and abundance of Ely and the grandiosity of its buildings in his Verse Life, *ibid.*, Book I, lines 283-354.

<sup>3</sup> Keynes, *Ely Abbey 672-1109*, pp. 41-55.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, pp. 65-76; Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter in Twelfth-Century England*, pp. 151-165.

<sup>5</sup> Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 54-56 and p. 203.

in the years immediately following the Norman Conquest. A celebration of the abbey's establishment five hundred years before would have been the ideal time at which to do this and served to promote the institution at a point when its influence and income could have been threatened by the popularity of the Canterbury shrine. It is evident that, just as both Bede in the eighth century and Æthelwold in the tenth had done, Ely's bishop, Nigel, was in the twelfth using an idealised version of the past to manufacture a vision of the future. Janet Fairweather says the compilation of the *LE* was part of a 'twelfth-century Renaissance' that was predicated on a learnt knowledge of languages, the law, and biblical history.<sup>6</sup> The interest in the past was being used to paint a picture of Ely's historical roots from half a millennium earlier, while scriptural references throughout the text established parallels between events that occurred in Ely's past and those that appeared in the Bible, and the legal charters and papal edicts legitimised Ely's claims to the land they were holding or trying to reacquire.

It is clear that the common thread throughout the *LE* is Æthelthryth. She founded the monastery from which the history of Ely originally stems; her life, death, translation, and miracles were the basis upon which her cult was established and thus the prosperity and influence of the abbey and bishopric of Ely was secured; and the land that Ely claimed as its own was held under her custodianship. The authors of the *LE* ensured that the role their saint played was evident both through the content of the text and through its organisation. An analysis of the sources that the Ely monks used reveals the level of thought and depth of knowledge that were needed to collate the text, while its organisation provides evidence that the arrangement of its chapters was planned to maximise the text's impact. This is especially apparent in the second and third books, where judicious placement of charters detailing Ely's legal battles over landholding next to tales of the misfortunes that befell those who threatened the Ely

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<sup>6</sup> *LE(F)*, pp. xviii-xix.

community meant that the individual effects of the legal and spiritual warning messages were amalgamated and multiplied.

The miracle stories of the *LE* themselves provide insights into the motivations behind the text's compilation, with a greater proportion of vengeful and retributive miracles than is evident from other collections revealing that Ely's position and influence in the twelfth century were perhaps more precarious than seemed to be the case on the surface. Visions of Æthelthryth, the recipients of which were given instructions by her or were observers of the curative acts she performed, were also a sizeable component of the miracle collection. The inclusion of these third parties to Æthelthryth's miraculous undertakings introduced witnesses and narrators, providing an extra level of authenticity. The majority of the miracles are recorded as having taken place in the half-century prior to the *LE*'s collation, and the timing of their recording, as with the timing of the writing of the *LE* itself, indicates a degree of planning and forethought on the part of the authors. Miracle narratives were a way of publicising the shrine, and the increase in the numbers of miracles coincides with the time leading up to the abbey's five-hundredth anniversary and the canonisation of Thomas Becket. With the production of the *LE*, Ely's bishop Nigel was trying to protect the institution's future legacy by anchoring its foundations in its past, using Æthelthryth as the connection that bound them together. Its completion in 1173 represented the culmination of a century that saw Ely progress from a position of isolation and opposition against William to that of a powerful, established Norman bishopric able to draw on its five-hundred-year history while also planning the safeguarding of its future, with the influence of the figure of Æthelthryth the fundamental component.

## The Aftermath of the Norman Conquest and the Creation of the Bishopric of Ely

By 1070, four years after the Conquest, Ely was a safe haven for rebels opposed to William I and an ideal location from which they could muster support against him.<sup>7</sup> At this time, Ely was a fenland island that had plenty of crops, abundant fish and wildfowl, was virtually impregnable, and, due to its size, would have been easily able to resist a siege.<sup>8</sup> Ely's role in the struggle against William is not in doubt with several sources describing the events of 1070-71, including the king's unsuccessful attempts to take the isle by force, and the subsequent political manoeuvrings that eventually enabled him to take control of the monastery and the town.<sup>9</sup> The accounts contained within the texts differ markedly in their interpretation of the Siege of Ely and also in the significance of the principal protagonists, however, especially from the rebel side. What is consistent, though, is the presence of St Æthelthryth within the texts, whose invocation and intervention can be seen as having a profound effect both upon the resolve of the rebels during the siege and the behaviour of William once it was over.

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<sup>7</sup> The siege itself is outlined in *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 102, pp. 173-176. Peter Rex describes the landscape in the immediate vicinity of the town in the eleventh century, saying that the island measured twelve miles by ten, and was surrounded by a fen that was up to two miles wide with only one reliable entry point, Rex, *The English Resistance*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>8</sup> In the *LE*'s Prologue, Ely is described as 'magnificent in its wealth and its towns; equally praiseworthy for its woods, vineyards and waters; exceedingly rich in all fruit, livestock-breeding and crops', ('*opibus et oppidis magnificam, silvis, vineis et aquis enim eque laudabilem, omni fructi, fetu ac germine uberrimam*'), see *LE(B)*, *Incipit de situ Elyensis insule*, p. 2. Although this description is, to a certain extent, hyperbolic, it does paint a picture of a town that would not have been easily overcome.

<sup>9</sup> The *LE*, *Gesta Herwardi*, and Peterborough and Anglo-Saxon Chronicles all provide accounts of the Siege of Ely and Hereward the Wake's role within it with varying levels of detail while Orderic Vitalis and William of Poitiers described the events from the point of view of William the Conqueror. See *ibid.*, Book II, chs. 102 and 104-107, pp. 173-176 and 177-188; Michael Swanton, 'The Deeds of Hereward', in T. H. Ohlgren, ed., *A Book of Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English* (Stroud, 1998), pp. 41-47; Harry A Rositzke, ed., *The Peterborough Chronicle* (New York, 1951), pp. 111-112; Michael Swanton, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (London, 2000), pp. 206-208; Marjorie Chibnall, ed., *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford, 1968-1980), Book VI, vol. II, pp. 256-258; and Ralph H C Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, eds., *The 'Gesta Guillelmi' of William of Poitiers* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 152-154.

The three local sources (i.e. the *LE*, the *Gesta Herwardi* – which was probably compiled at Ely<sup>10</sup> and was one of the *LE*'s author's sources of historical information<sup>11</sup> – and the Peterborough Chronicle) all tell of the role played by Hereward the Wake, a dispossessed Lincolnshire landowner, who was said to have led the rebels to safety at Ely after having inflicted a defeat on William's army at Peterborough and stripping the abbey there of its wealth.<sup>12</sup> While at Ely, Hereward insisted that his men swear oaths to Æthelthryth at her shrine, thus casting the saint in the joint role as both their protector and their advocate in the struggle against the Normans.<sup>13</sup> Hereward's invocation to Æthelthryth to act for him and against William appears to have worked, as on two occasions William's men attempted to gain access to the abbey by force, both times unsuccessfully. The first of these was thwarted as the platform that the army had built across the marshes collapsed under the weight of the soldiers and their horses, while the second was repelled by Hereward's troops as they set fire to the reeds that surrounded the siege towers William had erected as part of a planned offensive against them.<sup>14</sup> In marked contrast, however, the chroniclers of the life of William the Conqueror go into far less detail regarding his defeats, and make no mention at all of the part played by Hereward, attributing the leadership of the rebels at Ely to Earl Morcar, a nobleman of York and the brother of king Harold's widow, Ealdgyth.<sup>15</sup>

The reality of the situation is probably somewhere in between the two sets of accounts.

Archaeological evidence and Domesday records give historical credence to the textual accounts of William's campaigns against the rebels in the area,<sup>16</sup> and the landscape around the Isle of Ely

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<sup>10</sup> Blake has identified the unnamed author of the *Gesta Herwardi* as Richard of Ely, one of the potential compilers of the *LE* itself, *LE(B)*, p. xxxiv.

<sup>11</sup> The author of the *LE* acknowledges that this chapter is a summary of facts taken from a number of *Histories*, with the *Gesta* its principal source, *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 107, p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> Rositzke, ed., *The Peterborough Chronicle*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>13</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 102, p. 176.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II, chs. 104 and 107, pp. 178 and 185-186.

<sup>15</sup> Chibnall, ed., *Orderic Vitalis*, Book VI, vol. II, pp. 256-258; Davis and Chibnall, eds., *Gesta Guillelmi*, pp. 152-154.

<sup>16</sup> The Fenland Survey has identified a network of causeways that linked the various fenland islands to the southwest of Ely which William's army probably used to approach the monastery, (Davis and Chibnall,



lent itself to that of a highly defensible site, which makes the reports of the defeats inflicted on William's forces appear credible. Both Morcar and Hereward were likely to have been present at Ely during the siege of 1070-71 (and indeed the three local sources all mention Morcar as an ally of Hereward at Ely at the time, although all attribute its leadership to Hereward), but the authors of the respective texts emphasised some elements and assigned less importance to others depending upon the standpoints from which they were writing. The promotion in the twelfth-century texts of Hereward's role in the siege elevates him to a heroic figure. The accounts of him insisting that his followers declare their loyalty at Æthelthryth's shrine before they were admitted to his rebel group indicate that the texts' authors were identifying the saint with Hereward in two ways: firstly as an advocate and protector of him in his battles with William; and secondly as needing the protection that he, as a brave and noble defender against Norman aggression, could provide. This dual role for Æthelthryth combined with the increased significance of Hereward's participation show that the Ely monks writing the accounts of the siege forty years afterwards were attempting in whatever way they could to portray their struggle against the Normans as one of good and noble defence against evil aggression, legitimised through saintly authority.

Ultimately, though, William was successful in his attempt to gain control of the abbey, and he did it more through political stealth than force. William took advantage of a period of absence from Ely by Hereward to make his own peace with the monks. The only source available that describes the capitulation of the monks in any detail is the *LE*, which naturally portrays their participation in the best possible light, suggesting that they invited William onto the Isle where they were able to negotiate a non-violent transfer of power.<sup>17</sup> Significantly, the king is described as recognising the sanctity of Æthelthryth and, according to the text, upon entering

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eds., *Gesta Guillelmi*, p. 137), while Edward Miller analyses the reduction in the value of estates in the vicinity of Ely after 1066, linking them to William's army's passage through them and the confiscation by the king of the estates' land and resources (Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, pp. 66-74).

<sup>17</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, chs. 109-111, pp. 189-195.

the church he stood away from her body, since 'he was afraid of having judgement passed on him by God for the evils which his men perpetrated in the place'.<sup>18</sup> There are two possible explanations for the Norman king's actions at the shrine. He could have been genuinely affected by his belief in the power of the relics, and this was therefore a demonstration of the *potentia* that Peter Brown describes as becoming apparent when in close proximity to a shrine,<sup>19</sup> or he had realised the sanctity with which the community at Ely held the relics of Æthelthryth, and had shrewdly decided that by treating them with reverence and respect, he was able to avert further resistance from the monks. Either way, the influence that the saint's remains were able to exert became evident through William's behaviour at the shrine. The monks, therefore, while acknowledging that the isle and the abbey had been subdued, maintained the impression that the shrine, and therefore the body of Æthelthryth, remained unviolated. Thus, her sanctity had been preserved and their authority over the shrine and a degree of the autonomy they had previously enjoyed had also remained intact.<sup>20</sup>

This impression of the continuation of the monks' independence was not real, however, and the abbacy of Ely in the years between 1072 and 1100 was characterised by a succession of Norman appointees. The *LE* describes how, prior to the death of the 'distinguished'<sup>21</sup> Abbot Thurstan in 1072, the king had stated his intention to replace the abbot with a monk from Jumièges named Theodwine Gemesciens.<sup>22</sup> On the face of it, this looked to be a reaffirmation of William's control of the abbey after the Siege of Ely, and indeed the monks would never be able to recover the level of autonomy they had enjoyed prior to the Norman Conquest. However, this

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<sup>18</sup> '*verebatur sibi a Deo iudicium inferri pro malis que sui in loco patrarunt*', *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 111, p. 194.

<sup>19</sup> See Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, especially ch. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Blanton-Whetsell calls the monks 'authoritative agents on behalf of the saint', Blanton-Whetsell, '*Tota Integra, Tota Incorrupta*', p. 254.

<sup>21</sup> '*eximius*', *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 112, p. 195. Thurstan is also referred to as the 'beloved lord Abbot Thurstan' ('*dilecti domini Thurstani abbatis*') later in the *LE*, see *ibid.*, Book III, ch. 50, p. 289. However, while he was remembered fondly by the *LE*'s authors, it appears that he was able to do little to stem the increase in Norman control of the abbey in the period immediately after the siege, Keynes, *Ely Abbey 672-1109*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 112, p. 195.

period of Ely's history was rather more turbulent than it looks on the surface. Susan Ridyard goes as far as to call it a period of crisis,<sup>23</sup> while the VCH refers to the abbey at this time as 'the special prey of the Norman spoiler'.<sup>24</sup> The author of the *LE* appears with the benefit of hindsight to have painted a rather more positive picture of the events surrounding William's seizure of control of the abbey than was actually the case.

The causes of this period of instability at Ely were threefold. Firstly, there was a lack of continuity with regards to the position of abbot, which would have inevitably led to uncertainty and anxiety amongst the monks. Subsequent to gaining control of the abbey William had stripped it of all its valuables, but the newly-appointed abbot Theodwine had refused to take office until these had been returned,<sup>25</sup> and in any event his tenure was cut short as he died only two years later. There then followed a period where the abbacy was vacant until the appointment in 1082 of Simeon, formerly bishop of Salisbury, and a relative of William's. Simeon's death a decade later preceded another prolonged period during which the abbacy was vacant, and a degree of stability was only restored with the appointment of Richard at the turn of the century.

Secondly, a rift had been growing between the abbey at Ely and its parent bishopric in Lincoln. Simeon's ordination as abbot had been delayed because Remigius, the bishop of Lincoln, had insisted that it be carried out by him, whereas it had been decreed by King Edward forty years earlier and confirmed by the incumbent pope, Victor III, that the Ely abbots could choose whichever bishop they wanted to perform the ceremony. Despite this, the ceremony went ahead with Remigius presiding, which resulted in the monks at Ely shutting Simeon out of the monastery and refusing to recognise his abbacy, and it was only the intervention of Simeon's

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<sup>23</sup> Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 201.

<sup>24</sup> J Horace Round, 'Introduction to the Essex Domesday', in H. A. Doubleday and W. Page, eds., *VCH Essex, vol. 1* (London, 1903), p. 340.

<sup>25</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 113, p. 196.

brother Walkelin, bishop of Winchester, that made them relent and let him enter to take up office.<sup>26</sup> The struggle for independence from Lincoln would continue, however, and would ultimately result in the bishopric of Ely being formed in 1109.

Thirdly, the foundation at Ely had been subject to a series of land disputes since the Norman invasion, which had resulted in them losing considerable holdings outside of the Hundreds of Ely, in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk.<sup>27</sup> In some cases, Norman barons had taken advantage of the chaotic situation leading up to and during the Siege of Ely to lay claim to the outlying landholdings of the abbey at a time that the monks were in no position to defend against them, while in others the land had been confiscated as a result of the monastery's support for Hereward. Miller has calculated that between 1066 and 1086, Ely lost approximately three-quarters of its holdings across East Anglia.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Book II, ch. 118, p. 202.

<sup>27</sup> Keynes, *Ely Abbey 672-1109*, p. 47. The *LE* hints at this, saying that the county of Cambridge had 'fallen by chance to the lot of Picot ... a Gautelian' ('*Huic igitur Picoto ... animo Getulo, Cantebrigie comitatus sorte obvenerat*', *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 131, p. 211), while a set of lists of alienated lands documented and preserved in the Ely archives highlights the situation the abbey was in at the time of the Domesday survey in 1086, see Nicholas E S A Hamilton, ed., *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis (Being the Original Return Made by the Juratores of the County of Cambridge, from which the Exchequer Domesday was Afterwards Compiled)* (London, 2011), pp. 175-183 and pp. 184-189. The extent to which the lists quantify the amount of land that was lost from Ely has been analysed by Miller (Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, pp. 67-74) and R Weldon Finn (R Weldon Finn, 'The Inquisitio Eliensis Re-Considered', *English Historical Review*, 75 (1960), pp. 398-405).

<sup>28</sup> Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 67.

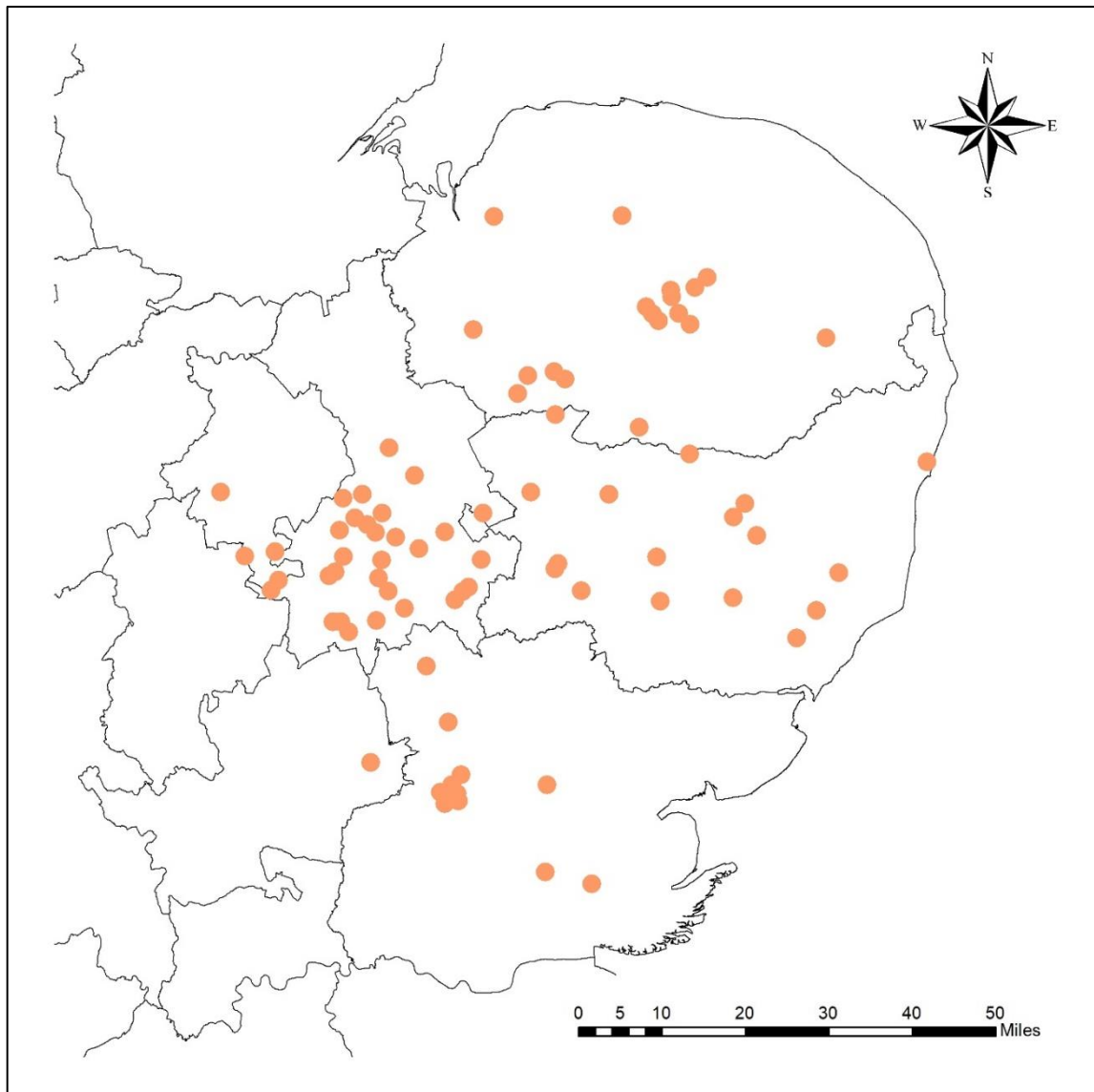


Figure 15. Locations of East Anglian Landholdings Lost by Ely after the Norman Conquest.<sup>29</sup>

Richard's appointment to the abbacy in 1100 signalled the beginning of a co-ordinated set of actions that made up the Ely foundation's defence against the difficulties that it was facing, a strategy that was continued by Richard's successor Hervey after the former abbot's death in 1107. Its basis, however, was formulated during the abbacy of Simeon some fifteen years

<sup>29</sup> Map compiled from a combination of records contained in the *Inquisitio Eliensis*, the land survey that was recorded at the same time as the Domesday Book but which contained a greater amount of detail, (see Hamilton, ed., *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, especially the map on the flyleaf), and Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, map opposite p. 76.

earlier. Despite the consequences of his ordination by the bishop of Lincoln and a sequence of underhand land claims that he completely failed to recognise or stop,<sup>30</sup> he is remembered as commissioning the rebuilding of the church at Ely in the mid-1080s. He was able to complete the erection of some of the domestic buildings before work stopped during the period between 1093 and 1100 when no abbot was in place, an achievement that is acknowledged by the *LE*'s authors.<sup>31</sup> What is less well-recorded however, although which was ultimately of greater significance, is the arrival of the itinerant hagiographer Goscelin of Saint-Bertin at Ely in either 1087 or 1088.<sup>32</sup> Contemporary records of Goscelin's time at Ely are very scarce, but it is known that he came across to England from the monastery of Saint-Bertin at St Omer in 1062, and spent a period of time at Winchester, which is where he may have met Simeon,<sup>33</sup> before staying at Canterbury where he worked on a series of liturgical writings.<sup>34</sup>

He had gained a reputation for producing liturgical and hagiographic works at a time when interest in the lives of the Anglo-Saxon saints was increasing<sup>35</sup> and he wrote mainly for the foundations that would support and shelter him,<sup>36</sup> and these are likely to be the circumstances within which he arrived at Ely. The production of a *vita* of Æthelthryth would have been a natural accompaniment to the building of the new church and the subsequent translation of her relics, and Goscelin's reputation and probable acquaintance with Simeon would have made him an ideal choice to undertake the task. Surprisingly, however, there is no evidence that a hagiography of Æthelthryth was ever produced by Goscelin, and instead what remains of his

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<sup>30</sup> The *LE*'s author attributes this to his great age – he was in his nineties at the time. *LE*(B), Book II, ch. 135, p. 218.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II, chs. 135 and 143, pp. 218 and 227-228.

<sup>32</sup> Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. xxi.

<sup>33</sup> Rosalind C Love, "'Torture Me, Rend Me, Burn Me, Kill Me!': Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Depiction of Female Sanctity', in P. E. Szarmach, ed., *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2013), pp. 275-276.

<sup>34</sup> Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. xxi.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii. William of Malmesbury called him 'second to none since Bede in praising the saints of England', R A B Mynors, et al., eds., *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum Anglorum, The History of the English Kings*, (Oxford, 1998), Book 4, ch. 342, p. 592.

<sup>36</sup> Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?*, p. 514.

work is a set of lessons for use in the liturgy that take examples from Bede's eighth-century *vita* of the saint celebrating her deposition and translation.<sup>37</sup> What makes the absence of a Life even more surprising is the existence of a set of *vitae* for the other female saints of Ely, namely Wærburh, Seaxburh and Wihtburh, the writing of which Rosalind Love has attributed to Goscelin from his time at Ely.<sup>38</sup>

It can only be speculation as to why there is no complementary Life of Æthelthryth. It may have been that Goscelin's work was prematurely concluded as a result of Simeon's death in 1092, or that the Bedan Life (which had been faithfully reproduced by Ælfric at the end of the tenth century) was considered to still be a good representation of the message that the monks wanted to convey. The latter seems less likely, since Bede's emphasis in his Life of Æthelthryth was on her sanctity and virginity as a way of life for the monastic community. Any narrative written shortly after the Norman Conquest would have focussed more on Æthelthryth's retributive and protective qualities in order to add legitimacy to the monks' support for the rebels and their opposition to William's actions against Ely. It is therefore more probable that a Life to be written by Goscelin had been planned, assuming that Love's compelling argument that the other saints' *vitae* had also been his work is correct.

The three *vitae* attributed to Goscelin all have *miracula* associated with them, and their existence adds further weight to the argument for a proposed Goscelin Life of Æthelthryth, since a small set of her miracle stories has also been identified which could have been the precursor to a full hagiography, although accurate dating of it has proved difficult.<sup>39</sup> Love has

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<sup>37</sup> These lessons can be found in the thirteenth-century Ely Breviary-Missal, Cambridge University Library, MS li. 4. 20.

<sup>38</sup> See Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, pp. lxxi-ci, for her analysis of the authorship and date of these texts.

<sup>39</sup> The *miracula* could conceivably have been written at any time between 975, which is the approximate year the latest miracle is recorded as having taken place, and 1125, the probable date of the earliest extant manuscript within which it is contained (CCCC MS 393), although Love uses stylistic comparisons to link it to Goscelin's other known works, *ibid.*, p. lxxv.

analysed the text and asserts (although with less conviction than for the other Ely saints) that it could also be the work of Goscelin while he was at Ely.<sup>40</sup> The miracle stories themselves are a copy of the much earlier standalone set compiled by Ælfhelm in the tenth century, which were incorporated into Ælfric's *vita* in around 998. Although highly significant when they were written in the context of the Benedictine Reforms as a demonstration of the suitability of the monks who had replaced the secular clerics at Ely, the content of the individual miracle stories themselves appears to have been of less importance to Goscelin. He was not selective in his choice of which to include, instead incorporating all of them, and as a whole they do illustrate the range of Æthelthryth's power, whether curative, retributive, or forgiving, and would have acted as an ideal complement to a *Life*.

It appears that Simeon's overall aim was to address the problem of Ely's land being appropriated by the Norman barons while also trying to restore the confidence of the monks at a time when the influence and stability of the Ely foundation was at its lowest since the Viking raids over two centuries before. As a result of Theodwine's successful retrieval of the valuables seized by William in 1072, money was less of a problem for the monastery<sup>41</sup> and so Simeon was able to commission the rebuilding of the church while also engaging Goscelin to write the hagiographies of the saints that were enshrined at Ely. This dual approach aimed to portray the monastery as an influential, independent, and outward-looking foundation with its focus on the cults of the female saints it housed, and with Æthelthryth at its centre. Unfortunately, however, Simeon's best intentions were thwarted by a combination of the power of the Lincoln bishop and the age at which he acceded to the abbacy. The dispute with Lincoln had delayed his appointment by two years and he had finally taken up office a frailer and less-effective

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. c-ci.

<sup>41</sup> The *LE* provides an inventory of the assets of the abbey after Theodwine's death in 1075 which shows that it held considerable wealth at the time, *LE*(B), Book II, ch. 114, pp. 196-197, and Thompson and Stevens suggest that at the time of the Conquest, Ely was the second richest in the country after Glastonbury, and that it became one of the richest again during the reign of Henry I (1100-1135), Thompson and Stevens, 'Gregory of Ely', pp. 335-336.



octogenarian, only to die two years later,<sup>42</sup> at which point the building work was abandoned, Goscelin's set of *vitae* was probably left incomplete, and no obviously identifiable successor as abbot was apparent.

It was only with the appointment of Richard FitzRichard de Clare as abbot in 1100 after a seven-year vacancy that the work that Simeon had started recommenced. Richard's appointment was confirmed by Henry I very early on in his reign and, as Crosby has noted, it was probably political expediency at a time when the king was still very vulnerable that made him choose a trusted member of a family with close ties to the crown, namely the Clares.<sup>43</sup> Whereas Simeon had focussed on the church rebuilding and the commissioning of hagiographies of Æthelthryth and her sisters, Richard's fundamental aim was the establishment of an independent bishopric and diocese of Ely, free from the diktats of the Lincoln bishops. Richard immediately made his intention to break from the see of Lincoln clear by refusing to be ordained by the then bishop, Robert Bloet, and in fact ended up not being ordained by anyone at all.<sup>44</sup> Richard was not universally liked, and his contemptuous manner soon attracted the anger of the king, who very quickly reversed his earlier decision and expelled Richard from Ely. This did not deter Richard from his original aim, however, and he made use of his time away from the abbacy to lobby the pope in Rome about his expulsion and his desire to create a separate bishopric, which resulted in him obtaining papal authority both to be reinstated as abbot and to progress with the planning of the new diocese.<sup>45</sup> In order to achieve this goal, he needed to harness the power of Æthelthryth's relics to build a cult strong enough and influential enough to compete with the nearby shrine centres of Bury St Edmunds, Peterborough, and St Albans. There are hints within the *LE* that the Ely monks were conscious of the influence of the other shrines in their vicinity –

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<sup>42</sup> The *LE* describes him as enfeebled, incapacitated and only able to walk with difficulty, which detrimentally affected both the religious and the administrative affairs of the abbey, *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 135, p. 218.

<sup>43</sup> Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter in Twelfth-Century England*, p. 157.

<sup>44</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 141, pp. 225-226.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II, chs. 142-143, pp. 226-228.

for instance, a miracle story attributed to Æthelthryth tells of the cure of a knight after he loses the power of speech, sight, and hearing, and he was said to live 'not far from the monastery of St Edmund's'<sup>46</sup> – but primarily the assertion that Ely's bishops had loftier aims is based upon the level of effort that Richard, and his successor, Hervey, expended to achieve them. An outcome that resulted in anything less than the ecclesiastical powerhouse that Ely was to become would not have warranted the investment that Abbot Richard and Bishop Hervey had made.

Once he had been reinstated as abbot, Richard's plans accelerated. He restarted the building of the new abbey church – the *LE* says that its planned size was increased, and that it 'should become clearly visible and shine forth to the advantage of all, in the presence of witnesses and amid the thronging of multitudes'<sup>47</sup> – and set a date in 1106 for the translation of Æthelthryth's relics. It is likely that Richard saw the former action, the completion of Simeon's building plans, as a necessary step in his goal of independence for Ely, while the translation could have been used as a demonstration of the power of the Ely saint.<sup>48</sup> The choice of date for translation and the careful consideration given to the list of invitees suggest a level of forethought far removed from that based on practical considerations alone. The date of 17 October was also the date in 695 of the saint's first translation, while the guests to the ceremony included Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury, who was invited to preside; Herbert of Norwich; Ealdwine of Ramsey; Richard of St Albans; Gunter of Thorney; and Nicholas, the archdeacon of Lincoln, all of whom were representatives of foundations that contained potential competitor shrines. It indicates that Richard was already thinking of the potential power of Æthelthryth's relics (since he had specifically chosen the date of her translation to be that of her first in 695), and thus how they

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<sup>46</sup> '*... non longe a monasterio Sancti Ædmundi*', *ibid.*, Book III, ch. 36, p. 274.

<sup>47</sup> '*... quasi super candelabrum posita, sub presentia testium et frequentia populorum cunctis innotesceret et luceret*', *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 144, p. 228.

<sup>48</sup> Keynes intimates that the rebuilding of the abbey was more a matter of practicality for Richard, although he does then go on to say that the abbot would have taken full advantage of the necessity of the translation, Keynes, *Ely Abbey 672-1109*, p. 54.

could be used to enhance the reputation of the Ely compared to the other monastic foundations in the area.

The declaration of Ely's independence from Lincoln was reported in the *LE* as a series of mandates between the bishop, the king, and the pope with none of the celebratory language that might be expected to accompany such a significant event.<sup>49</sup> In stark contrast, the language of the account of the translation of Æthelthryth's relics is detailed, descriptive, and full of hyperbolic sentiment and biblical references. Quoting Proverbs, the narrator says that the onlookers to the ceremony were full of 'the supreme joy and happiness that was brought about in the tents of the righteous,' and that there was hardly anyone in the congregation 'who either wished or was able to restrain himself from tears, being awash with the grace of Heaven.'<sup>50</sup> In keeping with the tradition of past relic translations, and especially the first of Æthelthryth's from over four centuries earlier, the ceremony was reported to have been accompanied by miraculous happenings (in this case thunder and lightning that shattered the church's windows), was attended by the religious dignitaries listed above, and culminated in the raising of the tomb on to its plinth behind the altar to the sound of praises and singing. This position in the centre of the abbey was where Æthelthryth's tomb remained throughout the Middle Ages until it was removed at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and the relics became an important focus of pilgrimage and veneration.

Richard's main aspiration – that of the formulation of an independent see of Ely – did not come to fruition in his lifetime, although it was in very large part down to him that it finally came about in 1109. He had died a year earlier, and was succeeded by Hervey, who was appointed by

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<sup>49</sup> See *LE(B)*, Book III, chs. 4, 5, and 6, pp. 247-250. These chapters are transcripts of communications from the pope to the ecclesiastical hierarchy in England informing them of Bishop Hervey's appointment and confirming the abbacy's change of status to a bishopric.

<sup>50</sup> '*... summe iocunditatis et letitie indicium, que facte sunt in tabernaculis iustorum*' and '*... gratia celesti perfusus, a lacrimis se velet aut valeret cohibere*', *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 144, pp. 229-230. The Bible quotation is from Proverbs, 14:11.

Henry I to Ely after a rather less noteworthy time as bishop of Bangor where he had tried to control the ecclesiastical community there through a combination of excommunication and cronyism.<sup>51</sup> William of Malmesbury attributes the establishment of the diocese of Ely to the fact that the Lincoln diocese was ‘too full of people’,<sup>52</sup> and while it was indeed the case that the Lincoln episcopate was the largest in England at the time and therefore the most difficult to manage,<sup>53</sup> this is more likely to be the ‘official’ reason for its creation, rather than the actual one. King Henry had been under pressure from Abbot Richard for a number of years to authorise the new bishopric, and Richard’s opportunistic lobbying of the pope following his expulsion from England in 1101 had only added to this. Miller has noted that Richard had again raised the matter with the king shortly before the abbot’s death,<sup>54</sup> and soon after his appointment, Hervey was sent to Rome where he was able to return with papal consent for the bishopric and diocese to be set up. The charter for the establishment of the new episcopate was issued and ratified at Nottingham, and the date chosen for this ceremony was 17 October 1109, four hundred and fourteen years to the day after Æthelthryth’s first translation, and exactly three years after her third.<sup>55</sup> The choice of date was, again, obviously no accident, and would have reminded the attendant clergy that Ely was Æthelthryth’s church, and its new-found autonomy would only serve to increase the influence it was able to wield over the East Anglian ecclesiastical landscape.

Just as Goscelin had been asked by Simeon to write the hagiographies of the female saints of Ely to complement the commencement of the building of the new abbey church in the last decade of the eleventh century, a full *vita* for Æthelthryth was commissioned twenty years later. This

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<sup>51</sup> Keynes, *Ely Abbey 672-1109*, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> Nicholas E S A Hamilton, ed., *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum Libri Quinque* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 325.

<sup>53</sup> Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter in Twelfth-Century England*, p. 151.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 75.

<sup>55</sup> *LE(B)*, Book III, ch. 6, p. 250. There is no record of the date of her second translation, by Bishop Æthelwold in 970.

was possibly in reaction to the translation of her relics in 1106 and the church's final completion in 1108, and maybe in part to complete the work that Goscelin was unable to finish. Gregory, of whom nothing is known other than the fact that he was an Ely monk who died sometime after 1116,<sup>56</sup> wrote a metrical Life of the saint which runs to nine hundred and eighty-three lines across three books. It is based upon Bede's *vita* of Æthelthryth, and particularly concentrates on the virtue of chastity and her sometimes forceful defence of it.<sup>57</sup> The message that she would have meted out retribution to anyone who interfered with her person (the inference being that this referred to her husband, Ecgfrith, who according to some of her *vitae*, pursued her after their marriage and her subsequent vow of chastity) and thus by extension her shrine and the Ely monastery, was a metaphorical warning to those who would try to steal away what was rightfully Ely's. This is not surprising, given the extent of the appropriation of Ely's land and property by Norman barons in the years immediately prior to when Gregory was writing.

While the production of the metrical Life in itself can be seen as a defensive response to the land-grab to which Ely had been subjected, there is evidence that Gregory's poem was one strand of a planned hagiography that was itself a part of the overall strategy to maximise the success and influence of the bishopric of Ely.<sup>58</sup> By 1131, and thus during the latter half of Hervey's tenure as bishop, a prose Life had been written to complement Gregory's metrical Life of Æthelthryth. The combination of both narratives in a single text were a reflection of Bede's own *opus geminatum*,<sup>59</sup> and were written for two different audiences; the prose Life being aimed primarily at those attending services, as it was intended for reading out in church, while

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<sup>56</sup> Thompson and Stevens, 'Gregory of Ely', p. 343.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>58</sup> The hagiography of Æthelthryth exists as CCCC MS 393. Its date has been confirmed to between 1116 and 1131, since it includes the details of a trial which took place in 1116, and also refers to Bishop Hervey, who died in 1131, as the most recent bishop, with no mention of his successor, and King Henry (reign 1100-1135) as the incumbent king, Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. lii.

<sup>59</sup> See Peter Godman, 'The Anglo-Latin 'Opus Geminatum': From Aldhelm to Alcuin', *Medium Aevum*, 50 (1981), for details of how this literary form originated and was used. *HE*, Book 4, chs. 19 and 20, pp. 391-401.

the metrical version was used principally for private study, with the rhythmic metre supposedly aiding the learning by rote of the text.<sup>60</sup> This dual function can be seen as internally having provided the Ely clergy with a clear, confidence-boosting message that Æthelthryth was willing to defend the rights of the Ely foundation against those that would have sought to interfere with its land and community, while also outwardly giving notice to the other East Anglian foundations that the bishop intended to increase his episcopate's power and influence, building on Æthelthryth's ancient heritage and royal lineage. The hagiographical set was completed by a separate compendium of miracle stories based upon the *miracula* compiled sometime in the previous century that was possibly attributable to Goscelin, providing further examples of Æthelthryth's curative and retributive powers.

The abbots still needed to directly address the continuing problem of Ely's landholding being eroded. The *LE* describes occasions when the king had been asked to intervene on the monastery's behalf to retrieve land that had been taken unlawfully, mainly towards the end of Simeon's life in the early 1090s.<sup>61</sup> This was by no means a long-term solution, however, and probably had had the adverse effect, as it showed the abbot to be weak and unable to assert his own authority. Richard and Hervey employed a more robust strategy, producing evidence from a number of charters that showed, with the authority of the king, that land that had previously been taken away from Ely should be returned.<sup>62</sup> These were collated in a text entitled *Libellus quorundam insignium operum beati Æthelwoldi* (the *Libellus*) and were collated from the record of landholdings that had been drawn up towards the end of the tenth century by Bishop

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<sup>60</sup> Godman, 'The Anglo-Saxon opus geminatum', p. 224.

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 135, p. 218.

<sup>62</sup> There are many examples of these charters in the *LE*, for instance *ibid.*, Book II, chs. 120-123, pp. 203-205 and Book III, chs. 10-14, pp. 253-256.

Æthelwold. The list of charters is extant in two manuscript versions both dating to the first half of the twelfth century, and both of which have their origins in Ely.<sup>63</sup>

Just as land that was donated to Ely was documented as being in the custodianship of Æthelthryth herself, so land taken from the abbey was recorded as having been taken away from the saint,<sup>64</sup> which provided legitimisation for the retributive action taken against the perpetrator by the saint that was a feature of some of Gregory's miracle stories. The fate of Gervase, a particularly greedy and evil landowner in the eyes of the monks, is a typical example. According to the miracle account he had been summoned to court where proceedings were being brought against him by Ely's abbot, but prior to him arriving there, Æthelthryth and her sisters had appeared before him and each had in turn pierced him through the heart with their pastoral staffs. He survived only long enough to warn his household that this fate awaited them if they were to commit similar crimes, who then were able to spread the word to the wider community.<sup>65</sup>

By the middle of the 1130s, Ely had produced a range of narrative tools with which to meet the threat to their landholdings head on. The charters which were collated together to form the *Libellus* were the legal justification the monastery could use to refute any further claims on their land and retrospectively claw back previously lost holdings. The miracle stories that described the retribution Æthelthryth would unleash acted as a warning to anyone brave enough or foolish enough to try to take away what was rightfully hers. The *opus geminatum* completed the literary set, emphasising the saint's heritage and royal connections. These three elements were strong in their own rights, and the work of Goscelin and Gregory was representative of the

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<sup>63</sup> The texts are contained in the manuscripts Trinity College, Cambridge, O.2.41, ff. 1-64<sup>v</sup> and London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A.xix, ff. 2-27<sup>v</sup>. Blake has dated the manuscripts to between 1109 and 1131, with the former probably being the earlier of the two, see *ibid.*, p. xxxiv. The derivation of the *Libellus* from the tenth-century Æthelwoldian list of charters is discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 76-77, above.

<sup>64</sup> As an example, *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 108, p. 188 describes how Gilbert de Clare, after stealing the monastery of Eynesbury from Æthelthryth, claimed it for himself.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II, ch. 132, pp. 212-213.

literary tradition of Ely that had been introduced by Bishop Æthelwold during the Benedictine Reforms of the tenth century.

The approach taken here of considering *in toto* the monastic community's actions over the six decades following the Siege of Ely and the establishment of Norman control of the abbey has revealed that the combination of political power, ecclesiastical power, saintly power, and legal power were employed in a co-ordinated and planned way by the abbots and first bishop of Ely. Their aim was to secure Ely's status as possibly the most powerful foundation in East Anglia in the twelfth century, independent of the see of Lincoln, in control of its landholding, and able to attract visitors, and therefore income, through the promotion of its saints, of which Æthelthryth was considered to be the most influential. Abbot Simeon's goals of rebuilding the church and producing a *vita* of Æthelthryth became one strand of Abbot Richard's, and ultimately Bishop Hervey's, overarching ambitions for Ely. The political leverage that they used to gain the support of King Henry and the pope combined with the demonstration of ecclesiastical power represented by the building of the new cathedral resulted in the creation of the bishopric of Ely in 1109. Meanwhile, Æthelthryth's saintly influence, demonstrated through the translation of her relics and the completion of the hagiographical set of *vitae* and *miracula*, were amalgamated with the legal power of the cartulary to portray Ely as a pilgrimage destination while at the same time safeguarding its land and wealth. The Ely community had been able therefore to employ a range of tools in their quest to reverse the fortunes of the abbey after the Norman Conquest. As a result, it is evident that not only were they ultimately successful in turning the original hostility towards the Normans into acceptance and cohesion, they were also able to move from a reactive and defensive position in 1070 to a proactive and forward-looking one seventy years later.



### **The *Liber Eliensis* – Historical Record, Hagiography, and Legal Safeguard**

The establishment of the bishopric of Ely in 1109 was the basis upon which the aim of increasing the foundation's influence could be realised, and the hagiography and cartulary that were completed by the early 1130s enabled the Ely community to progress further towards this objective. However, it is the production of the *LE* that occurred some sixty years after Ely had gained its independence that better represents the culmination of the foundation's long-term plans. The *LE* is a combination of Goscelin's and Gregory's hagiographical texts of Æthelthryth, the charters contained in the *Libellus*, and a history of Ely itself.<sup>66</sup> The full versions of the *LE* comprise three books, the first of which is principally the story of the life of Æthelthryth and the founding by her of the abbey at Ely. The second and third books continue the history of the abbey, with the second covering the period up until the creation of the bishopric in 1109 and the third describing events during the tenure of its first two bishops, Hervey and Nigel. Entries continue until the mid-1160s, which is when it is thought the compilation of Book I commenced. The original author cannot be definitively identified but has been narrowed down to one of two monks of Ely; Thomas, or, as is more likely, Richard, as suggested by Blake, the editor of the first edition of the *LE*. He based his suppositions on an analysis of certain key phrases within the text and comparison with other manuscripts known to have been authored by Richard.<sup>67</sup> The interventions of Ely's saint in a variety of guises are consistent themes that run through the *LE*'s three books: Ely's history was effectively initiated by Æthelthryth's act of patronage that was the founding of the abbey from which the community was established; her *vita* and *miracula* recount stories of how her actions influenced and reflected the fortunes of the abbey over the five centuries since its formation; and the charters relating to Ely's landholdings that were

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<sup>66</sup> Jennifer Paxton discusses the composition of the *LE*, referring to works of this type as either 'chronicle-cartularies' or 'charter-chronicles', see Jennifer Paxton, 'Monks and Bishops: The Purpose of the *Liber Eliensis*', *Haskins Society Journal*, 11 (1998), p. 18.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xlvii-xlix. Richard, the probable author of the *LE*, is not to be confused with Richard, the last abbot of Ely, who had died in 1109.

copied from the *Libellus* named Æthelthryth as the land's custodian, casting her in the role as protector and safeguard of the community's fortunes.

Bede's *HE* was the primary source for Book I, and in fact the *LE*'s author has expressly acknowledged this in some chapters, and has quoted directly from Bede's work in others.<sup>68</sup> However, as has been noted earlier, some of Bede's descriptions are lacking in detail, and therefore the *LE*'s author turned to a variety of other sources from which to augment the *HE*'s narrative. Another of Bede's texts, *De Temporum Ratione*, was used to relate events that occurred at the time of Æthelthryth's death in 679,<sup>69</sup> while genealogical tables compiled by the monk Florence of Worcester have been used in two chapters to provide detail regarding Æthelthryth's lineage, confirming her royal roots,<sup>70</sup> and historical narratives have been drawn from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*.<sup>71</sup> Throughout Book I the *LE* includes details of various other saints' Lives, including that of Guthlac by Felix, two versions of Bishop Wilfrid's Life by Eddius Stephanus and Eadmer respectively, the Life of St Edmund by Abbo, and Goscelin's Life of St Werburga, as well as William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum*.<sup>72</sup> Their inclusion in Book I appears to have been principally to add to the historicity of Bede's account from the *HE*.

The historical narrative was continued in Book II, but the sources the author used tended to be more local, reflective of the progression away from the description of the life of Æthelthryth and to the impact on Ely of the events leading up to and immediately after the Norman Conquest. The principal themes covered in Book II are Bishop Æthelwold's and King Edgar's patronage and their subsequent control of the foundation at Ely in the mid-tenth century, and the Ely monks' resistance against Norman control at the end of the eleventh. An account of the

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<sup>68</sup> The examples where Bede is either referred to or is quoted directly are numerous, but see for instance *ibid.*, Book I, chs. 2, 3, and 5, pp. 12, 13, and 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. 34, p. 50.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, chs. 2 and 8, pp. 13 and 20.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. 15, pp. 32-34 and Book II, ch. 80, pp. 149-150.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, chs. 2, 7, 8-10, and 37, pp. 12-13, 17-19, 20-26, and 52.

siege of Ely was, according to Blake, most likely to have been taken from William of Poitiers' *Gesta Guillelmi*, although Fairweather has acknowledged that the *Gesta Herwardi*, written at Ely in the early part of the twelfth century, would also have been used by the *LE*'s author.<sup>73</sup> The use of these two chronicles as the main sources for the historical narrative are a definite departure from the style of the texts that were used in Book I. In the *Gesta Herwardi*, Hereward is depicted as a heroic figure fighting a liberation battle against the Normans (Hugh Thomas has called the *Gesta* 'an entertaining story about an English hero, creating a fantasy of successful resistance to the Normans'),<sup>74</sup> and this portrayal was continued in the *LE*, as it states that he (Hereward) 'put himself in the way of danger for the common protection of his people, his object being that through him all the others may be liberated, or that he himself might confront danger on behalf of all.'<sup>75</sup> However, the author of the *LE* was, much as he was in Book I, at pains to emphasise the impartiality of his account of Hereward's actions, saying in the succeeding chapter that 'things beyond belief should not be related, even if they are true.'<sup>76</sup> The extracts from the *Gesta Guillelmi* were carefully chosen to accentuate the difficulties that the Normans faced when besieging Ely, thus also depicting the town's inhabitants as valiantly defending themselves against the Norman aggressors. The *LE* does however record that William's forces were ultimately victorious through sheer weight of numbers.<sup>77</sup> The selective use of the two accounts of the siege are demonstrative of the narrative history of Ely that the *LE*'s author was attempting to build. Much as Bede represented an idealised view of the past in the *HE*,<sup>78</sup> but

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<sup>73</sup> Blake notes that a number of the phrases that the *LE*'s author uses to describe the siege appear to be the same as, or derived from the *Gesta Guillelmi*, which was written very soon after the events they narrated, and at the latest by 1077, *ibid.*, pp. xxviii-xxix, while Fairweather notes where both similarities to and deviations from the text of the *Gesta Herwardi* exist, see for instance *LE*(F), footnote 477, p. 209 and footnote 486, p. 211.

<sup>74</sup> Hugh M Thomas, 'The *Gesta Herwardi*, the English and Their Conquerors', in C. Harper-Bill, ed., *Anglo-Norman Studies: Proceedings of the Battle Conference XXI* (London, 1998), p. 213.

<sup>75</sup> 'pro communi suorum tuitione periculo se obiecit, ut per illum ceteri liberarentur aut solus ipse pro omnibus periclitaretur', *LE*(B), Book II, ch. 106, p. 183.

<sup>76</sup> 'neu fide maiora dicantur quamvis vera', *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 107, p. 188.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II, chs. 110 and 111, pp. 191-195.

<sup>78</sup> Higham notes that Bede used the examples of St Oswald of Northumbria and St Aidan to articulate his vision for English Christianity, see Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, p. 143.

used the statements of witnesses to add authenticity to his accounts,<sup>79</sup> so the *LE* narrates the events of the Norman overthrow of the rebels with a combination of hyperbole and objectivity.

Although the narrative of the history of Ely is continued from Book I to Book II, there is a shift in focus from that of the first book towards Ely's landholdings. Two saints' lives are referenced, Goscelin's *Life of St Ivo*, and Osbern's *Life of St Dunstan*. However, whereas in Book I *vitae* tended to be included for historical context, their inclusion in Book II appears to have been more didactic. The chapters containing references to St Ivo and St Dunstan appear consecutively and are located amongst a number of records of land donations, with both emphasising the saints' patronage and devotion.<sup>80</sup> Interspersed with the details of the donations are descriptions of the major benefactors to the Ely foundation, such as Archbishop Wulfstan of Winchester, Bishops Ælfwine and Ælfgar of Elmham, Eadnoth of Dorchester, and Ely's own Ealdorman Brihtnoth.<sup>81</sup> Their narratives appear to have been written in very similar styles, and Fairweather has suggested that they are a re-ordered transcription of a now-lost work known as the *History of Seven Illustrious Men*, a highly complimentary commemoration of the abbey's most notable donors.<sup>82</sup> Their presence in Book II alongside the details of the land donations and the accounts of the lives of the two saints provides an indication of the message the *LE*'s author was trying to convey in this section, acting as a reminder of the benefits of generosity to the Ely foundation.

While the more formal language of the cartulary records contained in Books II and III is a direct counterpoint to that of the historical narrative, it acted to reinforce the messages that were being conveyed. The charters provided the documentary evidence of the upheavals and struggles that the monks of Ely endured, and which were described in the historical accounts.

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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 57-60, above, for details of how Bede uses the testimonies of Wilfrid and Cynefrith to add authenticity to his account of the *post mortem* healing of Æthelthryth's tumour.

<sup>80</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, chs. 71 and 72, pp. 140-142 and 142-143.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, Book II, chs. 62, 65, 71, 72, 75, 87, and 99, pp. 136, 138, 142, 143, 144, 157, and 169.

<sup>82</sup> See *LE(F)*, p. xv and footnote 295, p. 160.

They are a transcription of the records contained in the *Libellus*, but their placement in the *LE* coincides with the historical events that were taking place contemporaneously. This deliberate separation of the cartulary records and their insertion into the *LE* alongside related events were mechanisms that the authors used to reinforce their ownership of the lands being described in the charters. The charter record of the transaction was their legal claim to the land which was safeguarded by either the threat of vengeful saintly intervention from Æthelthryth or the authority of a papal instruction (or in some cases a combination of the two) and which acted as a legal defence against any future action to remove it from their possession. The chapters of the *LE* that are dedicated to the Ely community's claim over the vill of Stetchworth in Cambridgeshire demonstrate how the authors utilised the combination of legal justification, papal authority, and the threat of saintly retribution to legitimise their actions. Considering the amount of space attributed to it in the *LE*, the ownership of the land seemed to be a particularly thorny issue in Ely's side, so much so that Fairweather is of the opinion that the *LE*'s narrative was probably a transcription of a separate account solely related to Stetchworth.<sup>83</sup>

A parcel of land in the village was originally donated to Ely in perpetuity, according to the *LE*, around the year 1000 in lieu of payment for the board and lodging by the parents of a new monk, Ælfwine, and then was added to a few years later.<sup>84</sup> In 1150 the land was claimed by a cleric of Cambridge named Henry, on the strength of what the Ely monks purported to be a counterfeit charter. Ely's challenge to Henry's appropriation of the land was the first act in what was to become a series of legal cases and papal interventions that are described in great detail in the *LE* over the course of sixteen chapters of Book III, culminating in 1153 with King Stephen having decreed that the land was rightfully Ely's.<sup>85</sup> The detail that the *LE*'s author included shows that Stetchworth dispute was indeed a significant episode in its own right in the legal

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p. 426, note 422. Blake also provides a summary of all the events surrounding the court cases, see *LE(B)*, pp. 405-407.

<sup>84</sup> *LE(B)*, Book II, chs. 67 and 88, pp. 139 and 158.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Book III, chs. 96-104 and 108-114, pp. 344-353 and 355-362.

history of the bishopric at Ely, but what is also interesting is the account's placement within the text itself. The four charters proclaiming that the land belonged to Ely are immediately followed in the *LE* by a number of unrelated miracle stories. The first of these tells the story of a man named Stephen de Scalers, who, while in debt to Ely, promised under oath to pay, but subsequently perjured himself and was struck down with paralysis as a result.<sup>86</sup> There then follows a set of three healing miracles which took place at a spring located on the site of Æthelthryth's original burial after her death in 679. The first two of these tell of the curative powers of the water, especially to people who were of good character, while the third narrates the miraculous survival of a woman who had fallen into the well itself.<sup>87</sup>

The juxtaposition of the charters that detailed Ely's hard-fought victory against the cleric claiming the land at Stetchworth, the miracle story that warned of the fate of those who went against Ely, and the accounts that proclaimed the benevolent nature of Æthelthryth to those who were deserving of it, is unlikely to be accidental. In a relatively short series of narratives, the *LE*'s authors were able to demonstrate that land owned by Ely was theirs historically by right, legally through the courts, and ecclesiastically by papal decree. This legal justification was then reinforced by Æthelthryth through the demonstrations of both the consequences of challenging Ely's rightful claims, and the potential benefits of leading a good life. The story of the dispute surrounding Stetchworth can be seen as a microcosm of the themes that run through the *LE*. The author referred to an idealised view of the past, based upon the life of Æthelthryth, that provided a justification of his vision of the future for Ely. The consequences of not working towards this vision, or of actively threatening its achievement, were demonstrated through the retributive actions of Æthelthryth, while the rewards for those that heeded the messages contained within the *LE* were clear to see from the examples of the saint herself, the other saints' lives, and the seven Ely benefactors. The charters of the *Libellus* provided legal

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., Book III, ch. 115, pp. 363-364.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Book III, chs. 116-118, pp. 365-368.

vindication of the foundation's actions in claiming land that had been seized and a safeguard against future claims. The authors of the *LE* had given very careful consideration to the contents of their most important work, the order in which it was presented, and the messages they conveyed, and the miraculous interventions of their saint were a key component of their narrative strategy.

### **The Miracle Stories of the *Liber Eliensis***

The miracle stories contained in the *LE* are an integral part of the text that, in conjunction with the narrative history and the cartulary records, provide insights into the motivations behind its compilation. In total there are nearly seventy individual miracles attributable to St Æthelthryth dispersed throughout the three books, although there are far fewer in Book II than in Books I and III. They were probably collated slightly earlier than the *LE* together with a now lost Life of Æthelthryth and were likely to have been ordered chronologically, with this ordering being retained when they were incorporated into the *LE*. It can be safely presumed that this was the original intention since an extant Life contained in the twelfth-century manuscript CCCC MS 393, which dates from around the same time as the *LE* and which Blake has determined that also derived from the lost Life,<sup>88</sup> contains a phrase at each point in the text where a miracle story was supposed to have been present referring the reader to an appended *miracula*.<sup>89</sup> This signposting would only have made sense if the miracles had been located within the body of the text from which CCCC MS 393 had been copied. The incorporation of the miracle stories alongside accounts of the historical events that were taking place contemporaneously is an indication that the *LE*'s authors specifically wanted to anchor them to a particular point in time,

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<sup>88</sup> See Blake's introduction where he discusses the relationships of the extant manuscripts, *ibid.*, p. xxx.

<sup>89</sup> The phrase '*que prescripta sunt miracula*' occurs at every point the miracle story would have been present in the text from which the CCCC MS 393 *vita* was copied, see the appropriate folios of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 393.

adding spiritual reinforcement in the shape of Æthelthryth's interventions to the historical narrative they were writing.

Blake has suggested that the *LE* collection is an amalgamation of several earlier sets of miracles,<sup>90</sup> an assertion that is borne out when a chronological distribution of the dates they were recorded as having taken place is considered (see Figure 16, below).

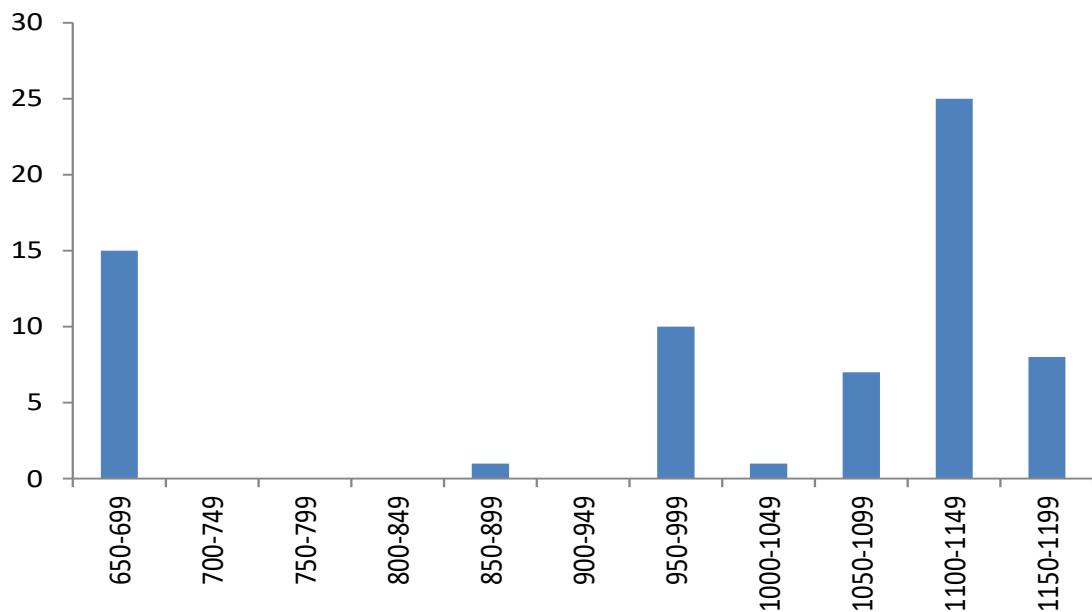


Figure 16. The Distribution by Time Period of the Miracle Stories of the *LE*.

It is evident that the miracles are grouped into several time periods, with the earliest grouping representing those that occurred while Æthelthryth was alive or around the time of the first translation of her relics. The sole miracle in the period 850-899 is the story of the Viking who attacked Æthelthryth's shrine with an axe, with dire consequences, while the group of a century later include those written by the monk Ælfhelm at the time of the Benedictine Reforms.<sup>91</sup> It is

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<sup>90</sup> See *LE(B)*, p. xxxii.

<sup>91</sup> The miracles performed while the saint was still alive or around the time of the translation of her remains in 695 are covered in Chapter 1, pp. 41-42 and 57, above, while the one Viking miracle and the six pertaining to Ælfhelm are described in Chapter 2, pp. 71 and 79-81, above.



clear, however, that the majority of miracles (forty in all, representing sixty per cent of the total number contained in the *LE*) were recorded as occurring in the later eleventh and the twelfth centuries, so in the one hundred years leading up to the production of the *LE*, with the latest having taken place within twenty years of the text's collation. This dramatic increase in the numbers of miracles recorded coincided with the timing of the upheavals in the foundation's fortunes linked to the Norman Conquest and the Siege of Ely, or what Ridyard describes as the 'exigencies of twelfth-century ecclesiastical politics',<sup>92</sup> and Ely's response to them. The disputes relating to the lands and property of the foundation that were taking place at the same time meant that Ely was being confronted with a number of threats at a time when the Norman bishops were planning to break away from Lincoln and transform Ely into a thriving East Anglian institution. It is therefore no coincidence that the number of miracle stories increased in a period when Ely was attempting to strengthen and then preserve its status and its position of influence, and that the example and perceived power of Æthelthryth was being utilised to help to achieve this.

Considering just these eleventh- and twelfth-century miracle stories and then incorporating the type of miracle that had been performed as an extra dimension reveals subtler differences in the reasons behind the collation of the miracle collection, as shown in Figure 17, below. The chart shows that half of all the miracles were curative, with a further fifteen per cent of them describing a benevolent, but non-curative, intervention by the saint. These actions included the freeing of a falsely-accused man from his chains,<sup>93</sup> the rendering harmless of potentially-destructive fires caused by lightning that threatened Ely's tower,<sup>94</sup> and the safe passage of some unidentified sailors caught out at sea in a storm,<sup>95</sup> all relatively common themes within miracle collections of the period. What is unusual about the profile of the miracles performed by

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<sup>92</sup> Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 52.

<sup>93</sup> *LE(B)*, Book III, ch. 33, pp 266.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, Book III, ch. 28, p. 264.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, Book III, ch. 132, p. 380.

Æthelthryth in the time leading up to the *LE*'s production, however, is how low this proportion of curative or beneficial miracles seems to be relative to that of other collections. Ronald Finucane, in his study of more than three thousand posthumous miracle stories, has calculated that up to ninety per cent of the collections he analysed tended to have been curative in nature,<sup>96</sup> a figure that is clearly far higher than the sixty-five per cent of those attributed to Æthelthryth.

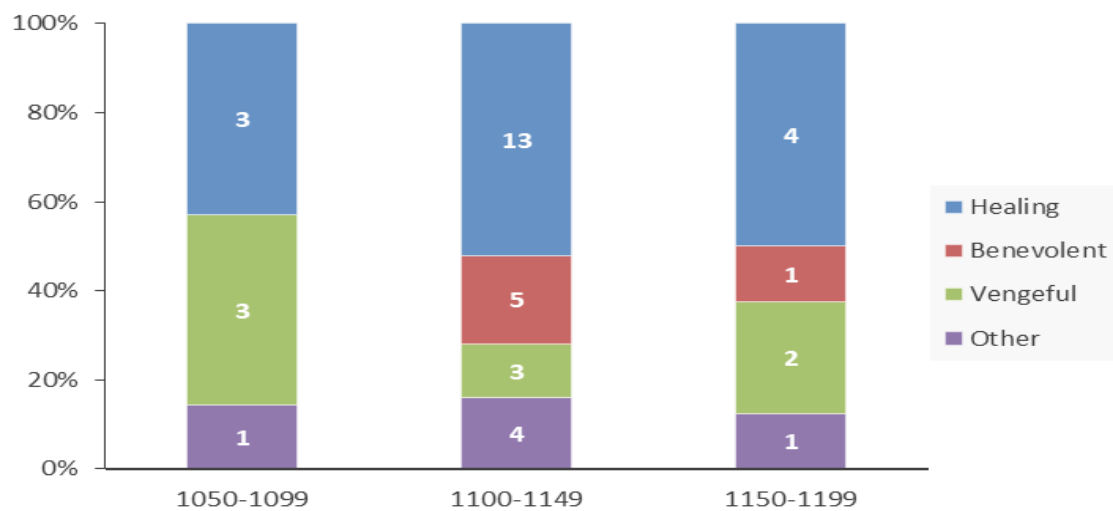


Figure 17. The Distribution by Miracle Category and Time Period of the Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Miracle Stories.

Of the fourteen miracles not classified as curative or beneficial, six could not be placed in any suitable category, including visions of Æthelthryth where the consequences of her appearance was less clear (as in the case of her appearance at Hyssington church, described earlier),<sup>97</sup> and those not directly relating to Æthelthryth herself.<sup>98</sup> The remaining eight are examples that

<sup>96</sup> Ronald C Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977), p. 75.

<sup>97</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 41-42, above.

<sup>98</sup> Three pertain to the death and translation of St Wihtburh, half-sister of Æthelthryth who was also buried at Ely, see *LE(B)*, Book II, chs. 146, 147, and 150, pp. 231-233 and 235-236. Æthelthryth is mentioned in all of them, however.

reveal the vengeful nature of Æthelthryth, a characteristic trait of hers that had been in evidence previously, primarily when her shrine had been threatened with attempted violation. The eleventh- and twelfth-century retributive miracles fall into two categories: those that tell of the punishment meted out to people who tried forcefully to gain access to her shrine; and those that recount the fate of anyone threatening the wider Ely community, primarily through (in the Ely monks' eyes) the illegal appropriation of the abbey's land.

In much the same way as the Viking who had tried to break into the tomb, a commanding officer of the king's army named Goscelin is recorded as having attacked the shrine and trying to prise away the precious metal and jewels that adorned it. He was rebuffed and lost the ability to walk, ending his life in 'poverty and tribulation'. Very soon afterwards, a colleague of Goscelin's, William of Shelford, had tried to violate the tomb with mallets and tools, but he and his associates were afflicted with various diseases including paralysis, loss of the ability to speak, and a severe infection and wound to the mouth.<sup>99</sup> Just as with the earlier miracles, the inviolability of the shrine is the important consideration here. Anyone who tried to interfere with the tomb, whether to steal the ornamentation that decorated it or to reach the relics of the saint inside, were either killed or severely dealt with, ending their lives in great pain, or destitute, or both. This narrative reinforced the message that the shrine and therefore the body of Æthelthryth should remain unviolated and thus her sanctity should be preserved.

Æthelthryth was not just the representative of the abbey at Ely, she was its custodian, its protector, and its guiding light, and by consistently re-emphasising the impenetrability of the shrine the Ely monks were portraying her as an unreachable figure, even more powerful through being unobtainable and unsullied by human intervention.

By warning of the dire consequences of opening or interfering with her tomb, the Ely community could, of course, have been pre-empting any suggestion that the remains were in

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<sup>99</sup> '*paupertate et erumpna*'. Both miracles are contained in *ibid.*, Book III, ch. 92, pp. 338-341.

fact not intact and uncorrupted, or that they were not even present in the tomb at all.

However, if this was indeed the reason behind the writing of miracle stories that so graphically illustrated the effects of failing to heed these warnings, then the *LE*'s authors could have delivered this message in a much less convoluted and complex way. The number of miracle stories of this nature and the intricacy of their composition points to a much greater level of consideration by the authors as to the message they were trying to convey. Æthelthryth's remains lay at the centre of a series of real and perceived protective layers, each of which served to strengthen the perception of the inaccessibility of her remains. The *LE* tells us that her body was encased in a stone sarcophagus that fitted her exactly and that was able to defy any attempts made to breach it, in a church that had been built by her sister specifically to house it,<sup>100</sup> on a remote (the *LE* actually uses the word 'inaccessible') piece of land surrounded by the marshes of the Fens where access was restricted to a handful of causeways.<sup>101</sup> Blanton-Whetsell describes this set of geographical boundaries as a 'bounded space protected by God',<sup>102</sup> which in turn suggests that any attempted violation of the shrine would have been seen as a sacrilegious act. These miracle stories not only acted as a deterrent that would hopefully have been strong enough to discourage any doubters or assailants, but also portrayed the shrine's inviolability, and therefore by implication Æthelthryth's virginity, as being safeguarded by God. The miracles that featured the impenetrability of her shrine were symbolic of the importance that was placed by the *LE*'s authors, as had been by Bede, on Æthelthryth's purity and thus the comparison of her with the Virgin Mary.

Æthelthryth's vengeance was not confined to those who tried to break into her shrine but was also meted out to anyone who threatened the Ely community's security or wealth. Gervase, a servant of the local sheriff, is described as being hostile to the Ely inhabitants, and had seized

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Book I, ch. 28, pp. 46-47.

<sup>101</sup> 'inaccessa', ibid., *Incipit de situ Elyensis insule*, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> Blanton-Whetsell, 'Tota Integra, Tota Incorrupta', p. 231.

some of the monastery's lands, which, despite being ordered to do so by King William, he had not subsequently returned. Æthelthryth's punishment was severe: she appeared to him along with her three sisters and pierced him with her staff. Her actions were replicated in quick succession by her siblings, all of whom were also enshrined in the monastery at Ely, and Gervase survived this onslaught only long enough to describe the vision to his household.<sup>103</sup> Blanton-Whetsell says that the monks were portraying Æthelthryth as 'an indomitable *virago* capable of defending her properties through force',<sup>104</sup> and the miracle stories reflect this vengeful figure that was protecting the monastery and its monks from all-comers. This miracle is an example of the retribution Æthelthryth delivered to those who attempted to take away the lands that the monastery felt was rightly theirs, and thus the protection that the saint provided in order to maintain her inviolability was extended to the monastic community and its landholdings on the Isle of Ely. This utilisation of the saint as protector and guardian has parallels with Marian shrines,<sup>105</sup> and again highlights the comparison that can be made between Æthelthryth's role for the Ely community and that of the Virgin Mary to other contemporary shrines.

While the types of miracle performed by Æthelthryth and recorded in the *LE* demonstrate the ways in which the saint's influence was utilised by the Ely community in their quest to restore Ely to the dominant position it had previously held, the geographical spread of either where the miracles occurred or the location from which the benefactor travelled illustrates the reach of Æthelthryth's influence across this period. Curative miracles formed a greater proportion of those recorded after 1100 than before, and this increase coincides with more evidence of remote miracles and of greater distances being travelled by those who were cured. The *miracula* records that the healing powers of Æthelthryth were being experienced not only

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<sup>103</sup> *LE*(B), Book II, ch. 132, pp. 251-253.

<sup>104</sup> Blanton-Whetsell, '*Tota Integra, Tota Incorrupta*', p. 256.

<sup>105</sup> Marcus Bull uses the example of a series of miracles from the Marian shrine at Rocamadour where it is violated and subsequently protected, see Marcus G Bull, *The Miracles of Our Lady of Rocamadour: Analysis and Translation* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 31.

across East Anglia, but as far afield as Northamptonshire,<sup>106</sup> Sussex,<sup>107</sup> and Gloucestershire.<sup>108</sup>

This shift in the nature and locus of Æthelthryth's interventions suggests that the intention of the LE's authors was to portray Ely as a successful, outward-focussed foundation, no longer inhibited by its ties to the bishopric of Lincoln, whose position was secure and whose landholdings were not threatened. Again, however, and consistent with other narratives found throughout the *LE*, the claims of miraculous cures have not simply been stated but have been validated by first- or second-hand accounts which served to add authenticity and objectivity to the beneficiaries' stories. Bull, in his analysis of the miracle stories of the Virgin at Rocamadour, has highlighted the importance of remote miracles in enabling information about the cult centre and its curative powers to be disseminated.<sup>109</sup> He has noted that the final element of the story tended to be the recounting of the cure by the beneficiary at the shrine with an expectation that their experience was shared with other pilgrims and the abbey's monks. The account would then be collated with others and would ultimately be reproduced in a *miracula*. Bull's interpretation of the remote miracles of Rocamadour can be applied to those recorded in the *LE*, and indeed the language that is used is also consistent. For instance, after being cured by Æthelthryth, the knight Robert de Alpa Ripa 'hastened on his journey to this church of Ely' where 'in the presence of us all [i.e. the monks] related the sequence of events'.<sup>110</sup>

A proportion of the remote miracles attributed to Æthelthryth were visionary, and generally involved the saint appearing to someone who was then instructed to influence a third party to

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<sup>106</sup> A man from Northamptonshire travelled to Ely and was cured after being told by God that Æthelthryth would be able to ease the suffering he was enduring which meant that he could not stand, walk, lie, or sit, *LE(B)*, Book III, ch. 116, pp. 365-366.

<sup>107</sup> The saint appeared to a knight, Robert de Alta Ripa in Arundel after he had made a candle-vow to her and cured him of an illness so serious that he was 'an object of disgust and contempt in the sight of all his people' ('*ut diuturnitate languendi omnibus suis fastidium et contemptum verteretur*'), *ibid.*, Book III, ch. 42, pp. 280-281.

<sup>108</sup> A girl from Cirencester, Reinburgis, had her sight restored at the shrine after Æthelthryth appeared to her in a dream and told her to hurry to Ely, *ibid.*, Book III, ch. 60, pp. 307-312.

<sup>109</sup> Bull, *The Miracles of Our Lady of Rocamadour: Analysis and Translation*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>110</sup> '*tantaque alacritate iter arripuit ad Elysensem hanc ecclesiam ... coram omnibus nobis enarravit*', *LE(B)*, Book III, ch. 42, p. 281.

undertake a task, change their behaviour, or to deliver a message. In one instance, Æthelthryth and her sisters were recorded as having appeared to an Ely monk named Godric who had earlier been maintaining a vigil for a number of monks who were sick and close to death in the abbey's infirmary. The saintly women had made their way to the beds of the dying men and had touched their heads, whereupon they were cured. Godric, after having witnessed this while asleep, had approached the visionary women, and after asking them who they were, was informed by Æthelthryth of their identities. Fortuitously, these events were said to have occurred at the very time Goscelin was staying at Ely and writing his account of Æthelthryth's life and miracles, meaning that he was able to incorporate Godric's story into his narrative immediately after it had taken place.<sup>111</sup> Following a similar theme, Æthelthryth appeared to a woman who, once the saint's identity had been established, was instructed by her to go to the home of a mortally sick knight named Leofmær and tell him that he had to bring a candle to Ely, whereupon he would be healed. This he duly did, and after the cure had taken effect, he recounted to all who would listen how St Æthelthryth had saved him.<sup>112</sup> Both these visionary miracles and the remote miracles described earlier demonstrate the advantages of having an intermediary or third person recount their experiences, especially if they were trusted and credible. Godric, the messenger in the first visionary miracle described above, was formerly a monk of Winchester who was apparently the most pious and trustworthy of a group of ten monks that had been transferred to Ely,<sup>113</sup> while Leofmær was a knight and landowner. In this way, the miracles performed by Æthelthryth were able to be reported as historical, factual accounts in the *LE*.

The miracle stories of the *LE* together reflect the development of the Ely foundation from the time of the Norman Conquest until its collation a century later while also providing further

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., Book II, ch. 133, pp. 213-216.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., Book III, ch. 36, pp. 274-276.

<sup>113</sup> Godric is described as 'like a shining star amid clouds' (*'velud stella inter nebulus effulgens'*), *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 133, p. 213.

evidence of how the portrayal of Æthelthryth's character was altered and manipulated in order to maximise the effectiveness of the messages being conveyed through them. Their placement within the *LE* linked them directly to the events with which they were interspersed, and which were recorded as happening at a similar time, adding either spiritual reinforcement or acting as a warning of the consequences of ignoring or challenging the objectives of the Ely bishops. The change in the nature of the miracle stories, from principally retributive and vengeful to more benevolent and curative, together with the corresponding increase in the number of remote miracles, reflected the evolution of Ely from its precarious position in the late eleventh century to the more stable one in the twelfth as the bishops' strategy to increase the foundation's power and influence took effect. At the same time, the emphasis on the inviolability of Æthelthryth's shrine and its connotations regarding the significance of her virginity and comparisons with the Virgin Mary were underlining her role as a spiritual exemplar, a perception that was reinforced through the inaccessibility of her mortal remains. While the messages they conveyed were powerful ones, however, the miracle stories' full impact and the underlying motivations behind their writing only becomes evident when they are considered in the light of the events leading up to the production of the *LE*.

## **Conclusion**

Although covering a relatively short period of time in the history of the cult of Æthelthryth, the events that occurred during the century described here were some of its most momentous. The abbey's fortunes, which had appeared to be so bright only a few years before thanks to the reforms introduced by Æthelwold, had been dealt a severe blow through both its role in the rebellion against William I and the opportunistic actions of the Norman barons in seizing a large proportion of its land. It was only through the capitulation of the Ely monks and the appointment of a succession of Norman abbots and bishops that the ebb and flow in the tide of



Ely's prospects turned once more in its favour. What has been demonstrated by viewing holistically the events of the hundred or so years after the Conquest is that this latest reversal of fortune was not accidental or the inevitable outcome of the effects of external circumstances, but was in fact the consequence of a sequence of planned actions undertaken by Ely's ecclesiastical leaders.

The Norman abbots and first bishops of Ely worked towards one overriding aim, that of elevating Ely to the status of the most powerful foundation in East Anglia, independent of the diocese of Lincoln. Their strategy to achieve this was multi-faceted and played out over a long period of time, incorporating the writing of two separate Lives of Æthelthryth, the gaining of the patronage of both king and pope, and the building of a new church that was to become the seat of the first bishop and the suitably grand setting for the saint's shrine. The translation of Æthelthryth's relics was the final major step in Ely's long quest to break from Lincoln. From 1109, as a direct result of becoming a bishopric in its own right, Ely was able to use its newfound influence to increase its landholdings,<sup>114</sup> begin to protect itself from those who tried to lay claim to its wealth,<sup>115</sup> and free itself of paying unwelcome taxes and tolls.<sup>116</sup> From the time of his appointment in the 1130s the focus of the new bishop, Nigel, was the consolidation of the progress that had been made by his predecessors. A new Life of Æthelthryth (the lost Life to which Blake refers)<sup>117</sup> was written based on the *vitae* of Goscelin and Gregory, historical accounts of the miracles witnessed at Æthelthryth's tomb were collated and augmented with more recent narratives (including those of the miracles that purportedly occurred while Goscelin was resident in Ely), and the charters listed in the *Libellus* were updated and

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Book III, chs. 18 and 20, pp. 258 and 259 are just two examples of charters declaring that land be taken under Ely's control.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., Book III, ch. 11, p. 253 describes a charter from King Henry I that warns 'against the usurpers of estates and goods of St Æthelthryth' ('*contra invasores terrarum et bonorum sancte Æðelðeðe*').

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., Book III, ch. 15, p. 256 details a reduction from £100 to £60 in the amount of money paid by Ely as scutage (money paid in lieu of military service by knights), and ch. 21, p. 259 describes a charter that exempts the monastic community at Ely from paying tolls and customs duty.

<sup>117</sup> See *ibid.*, p. xxxi.

transcribed. This range of texts was then organised chronologically and amalgamated with a bespoke history of Ely which, in the author's eyes, brought together all the 'wonderful achievements and successes of the Isle and the actions of great men',<sup>118</sup> and the *LE* was completed in 1173. Although nowhere in the *LE* is it specifically stated, it is unlikely that the choice of date for the text's production was an accident. The five-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the abbey was clearly a cause for commemoration, and a historical account of Ely based upon the life and afterlife of Æthelthryth, the founder and guardian of the Ely community, was a fitting tribute with which to celebrate it. However, the murder of Thomas Becket in 1170 and his canonisation three years later, in the same year as the *LE*'s production, could not have been foreseen by its authors. Any potential increase in pilgrimage to his shrine at Canterbury could have affected the numbers visiting other shrines across the country, and Ely was no exception. The Ely bishops' response was the appending of an account of Becket's death to the end of the newly-completed *LE*, reporting the event in a 'succinct and nimble style',<sup>119</sup> noticeably without hyperbole or reference to any miraculous occurrences or healing powers his remains may have demonstrated, presumably so as not to diminish the effect of those displayed by Æthelthryth.

The events that occurred in the century spanned by this chapter demonstrate how the full range of the facets of Æthelthryth's character were utilised in the transformation of Ely from an isolated rebel stronghold to an independent and powerful ecclesiastical institution. Throughout this period Æthelthryth was variously portrayed as the protector of the rebels facing William's army, the custodian of the land that Ely was either trying to retain or reclaim, the administrator of the punishments meted out to those who threatened Ely's security or attempted to thwart the bishops' plans, the powerful and benevolent saint whose translation and shrine were the

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<sup>118</sup> '*admiranda opera et eventus insule ac gesta magnorum*', *ibid.*, *Incipit prologus de historia Eliensis insule*, p. 1.

<sup>119</sup> '*ideo succinte et levi*', *ibid.*, Book III, ch. 143, p. 391.

catalysts for attracting visitors to Ely's new cathedral, and the patron upon whose generosity Ely's abbey was founded and its subsequent history was based. During of the Siege of Ely, Hereward's stipulation that anyone joining his rebellion must pledge allegiance to the saint cast her in the role of both defender and defended, protecting the rebels from the actions of William's army while also acting as a focus for their resistance against him. The king's deference to her shrine after successfully taking control of the abbey signified his acknowledgement of the power she possessed and the influence she had over the Ely community. Goscelin's miracle story compendium and Gregory's hagiography were the key narratives in the textual armoury that was built up prior to Æthelthryth's translation, and the translation itself was a proclamation of Ely's status, newly achieved through the efforts of its last abbots and first bishops, with their saint's example forming the basis of their strategy for independence from Lincoln.

With evident similarities to the phases of development identified in the previous chapter which characterised the Benedictine Reforms, the period of expansion that resulted in the establishment of the bishopric of Ely was followed by one of consolidation. The amalgamation of Ely's principal texts into one major work was a natural choice for the monastic community to undertake, especially considering the reputation of Ely's scriptorium,<sup>120</sup> and it acted as a celebration of the life of Æthelthryth as well as a promotion of the shrine. At the same time, the Ely monks were mindful of the legal battles fought over their landholdings. The collation of cartulary information was a much-needed recording of the land and property acquisitions made on the foundation's behalf primarily by Bishop Æthelwold and King Edgar, a schooling for the monks in the legalistic language of writs and charters, and a pre-emptive defence against future litigation which was always a threat in the post-Conquest church. The compilation of the *LE* was a very timely reminder of Ely's history, a celebration of the powerful position the bishopric had

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<sup>120</sup> Fairweather says that 'the monks of Ely could boast hagiographers ... among their number', (*LE(F)*, p. xix), and it is likely that the traditions of manuscript production and illumination that were introduced by Æthelwold at Winchester were emulated at Ely.

achieved by 1173, and a safeguard against any future threat, with the figure of Æthelthryth cast in multiple lead roles, as founder and abbess, custodian and saviour, and benefactor and patron. The *vita* and *miracula* of Æthelthryth contained in the *LE* were subsequently copied, amended, revised, and transmitted multiple times.<sup>121</sup> The *LE* was a textual legacy which, through its celebration of the previous five hundred years of Ely's history, formed the basis of the development of Æthelthryth's cult in the five hundred that were to follow.

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<sup>121</sup> Using Blake's study of the manuscripts of the *LE* and the relationships between them, at least twelve extant manuscripts can be identified, the origins of which are traceable back to the first version completed in 1173, and with the latest dating from the middle of the seventeenth century. See Blake, 'Historia Eliensis', which was subsequently incorporated into his edition of the *LE* as *LE(B)*, pp. xxiii to xlvi, for his analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **1173 TO 1445 – TEXTUAL AND MATERIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SAINTLY POWER**

In contrast to the periods covered in the previous two chapters, which were centred on pivotal events that were influential upon and influenced by the cult of Æthelthryth, such as the Benedictine Reforms, the creation of the new bishopric, and the production of Ely's textual legacy in the form of the *LE*, the timespan discussed in this chapter contained no defining event which fundamentally affected the Ely cult. Instead, the three centuries following the completion of the *LE* were epitomised more by the development of three separate cultic traditions that together resulted in knowledge and veneration of Æthelthryth becoming more widespread by the middle of the fifteenth century than at any point prior to this. Firstly, the commemoration of Æthelthryth on her feast days, which had permeated through the Benedictine foundations of the south and east of England by the middle of the eleventh century, became increasingly more widespread from the late twelfth century onwards. Secondly, the manipulation and interpretation of the character of Æthelthryth that was such a feature of *vitae* dating from the time of Bede onwards continued through this period, as hagiographers found new ways of portraying their saint to support the messages they were trying to convey. Finally, alongside the expansion of these textual traditions, increasingly throughout this period the major monastic centres of England could be seen to be trying to capitalise on the popularity of Æthelthryth's shrine by claiming to be in possession of relics of her.

The appearance of Æthelthryth in English ecclesiastical calendars was a tradition that had its origins in Æthelwold's scriptorium at Winchester in the late tenth century. While the production of these earlier calendars was limited to sites in the south and east of England such as Winchester, Canterbury, and of course Ely itself, calendars containing Æthelthryth's feast days began to appear in progressively greater numbers in the west, north, and the Midlands of

England in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. To a certain extent, the spread of occurrences of Æthelthryth in litanies mirrored that of the calendars. While there is not a complete overlap between the two, there are enough similarities in the geographical and chronological spread of the calendars and litanies that contain Æthelthryth to safely assume that they were being disseminated in the same way. It appears that, just as had happened in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Æthelthryth's feast day was being added on to calendars and her name was being included within litanies that originated in Benedictine foundations. As the network of Benedictine abbeys had spread across England, so too had knowledge of Æthelthryth's cult, meaning that by the middle of the fifteenth century her story was being told and her intercession invoked in locations as geographically remote from each other as Durham in the north and Exeter in the southwest.

As well as allowing the progress of Æthelthryth's cult in medieval England to be charted, the calendrical information has also provided evidence of the only sustained venerative activity that took place outside England. The discovery of calendars and litanies containing references to Æthelthryth in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden is a clear indication that knowledge of her cult had been introduced into Scandinavia, with the earliest of the documents dating from the middle of the eleventh century. Analysis of the extant manuscripts has indicated that, by 1500, Æthelthryth's feast days were being commemorated in thirteen discrete locations across Scandinavia. Dating of the manuscripts reveals that their production coincided with the introduction of Christianity to Scandinavia, which was gaining momentum by the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is therefore possible that Æthelthryth was being used as an exemplar by visiting missionaries from England to the monastic communities that were being established in the Nordic countries in the years following the Norman Conquest, just as her story had been introduced into Francia by monks such as Boniface and Willibrord in the eighth century.

As knowledge of Æthelthryth and the healing properties of her relics spread through the network of English Benedictine houses from the thirteenth century onwards, so pilgrimage to the shrine of Æthelthryth at Ely increased.<sup>1</sup> This would have inevitably attracted the interest of the other English shrine centres whose involvement with her cult up to this point had been limited to the celebration of the anniversaries of her death and translations. In what could be seen as a shift from a passive recognition of the saint – with parts of her *vita* being read aloud on her feast days – to a more active promotion of her cult, increasing evidence of claims of the possession of relics of Æthelthryth can be seen during this period. The relic lists of several major pilgrimage destinations reveal that they claimed to hold primary or secondary relics of the saint which contained healing properties, many of which unsurprisingly involved tumours and ailments relating to the neck. These relic lists, from as far apart as York and Salisbury, and containing varying degrees of detail, provide evidence of the growing popularity of the cult of Æthelthryth at Ely and the other shrine centres' efforts in trying to capitalise on it.

The writing of the *LE* had spawned a new-found interest in the life of Æthelthryth which was the catalyst for the commissioning of a number of *vitae* over the following three centuries. These were generally not just straightforward transcriptions or copies, however, but, as with previous Lives, they were modified and altered to suit the intentions of the foundation producing them. Two in particular, the thirteenth-century *Vie Seinte Audrée* (the *Vie*) and the fifteenth-century *Wilton Life of St Etheldreda*, exemplify how the foundations that commissioned the Lives highlighted certain traits of Æthelthryth's character in order to convey very specific messages to

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<sup>1</sup> There is abundant scholarship that recognises the increasing popularity of pilgrimage throughout the later medieval period, see for instance Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2000), especially chs. 3 and 4, pp. 35-92; Hopper, *To Be A Pilgrim*, chs. 5 and 6, pp. 51-77; and John Crook, *English Medieval Shrines* (Woodbridge, 2011), ch. 7, pp. 171-212. Duffy also comments on the large number of pilgrimage destinations in existence in England by the end of the fourteenth century, calling them 'legion', see Eamonn Duffy, 'The Dynamics of Pilgrimage in Late Medieval England', in C. Morris and P. Roberts, eds., *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 166. With regard to the level of pilgrimage experienced specifically at Ely during this period, Nilson's study of the amount of offerings made at the shrine of Æthelthryth shows a steady increase from £11 in 1302/3 to a maximum of over £94 a century later, see Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England*, Table 3, p. 216.

the audiences at whom they were targeted. The *Vie*, which probably originated at Chatteris Abbey in Cambridgeshire, emphasises Æthelthryth's patronage, and in particular the founding of the abbeys at Hexham and Ely, both of which were established by Æthelthryth. A discussion regarding the composition of the *Vie* provides evidence that a nun named Marie de France was the most likely author, which in turn places its origin at Chatteris in the thirteenth century. However, the only extant copy of the manuscript was the product of the abbey of Campsey Ash in Suffolk, and dates from approximately a century after the original, and it is this version from which the textual analysis reveals that the *vita* was written specifically for an audience of wealthy, female patrons. The success of the *Vie*, through its portrayal of Æthelthryth, in convincing its audience to donate to the abbey is extremely difficult to ascertain. However, an analysis of the financial situations of Chatteris and Campsey Ash from around the time their respective manuscripts were written indicates that they were both in a more healthy position after the production of the *Vie* than before. While this in no way proves cause and effect and it cannot be stated that the abbeys were better off *because* the *Vie* was able to generate a greater level of donations, the possibility of a link between the production of the *vita* of Æthelthryth and the generosity of the abbeys' patrons cannot be precluded.

The *Wilton*, an anonymous metrical Life produced at Wilton Abbey in Wiltshire towards the end of the period covered in this chapter, is unusual in that it is the most recent *vita* of Æthelthryth to have been completed that was not written as part of a compendium of saints' lives such as the *Legenda Aurea* or the *South English Legendary*. Its portrayal of Æthelthryth has been interpreted as either an exemplar role model to the nuns of Wilton, who appear to have not been adhering to the Rule of St Benedict and had been admonished by the bishop of Salisbury, or, contrastingly, as a nationalistic icon and symbol of England's ancient royal lineage, propaganda for Henry V's campaigns against the French during the Hundred Years' War. These two juxtaposed views of the representation of Æthelthryth either positions the text containing the *Wilton* as a specific response to an isolated issue, that of misbehaving nuns, or as one small



element of a much larger co-ordinated strategy by the king to use hagiographies to paint an idealised, nationalistic view of English history. The evidence for both hypotheses is discussed here, and both have merit, but the anonymity of the text's author makes understanding the reasons behind its composition much more difficult. Whether the goal was to remonstrate with wayward nuns or to engender patriotic feelings in support of the king, it is evident that the figure of Æthelthryth was again being used to illustrate and emphasise the hagiographer's meaning. The representations of Æthelthryth in the *Vie* and the *Wilton*, which saw her being reinvented and remodelled into new guises almost seven hundred years after the first portrayal of her in Bede's *HE*, clearly demonstrate how the flexibility of Æthelthryth's character was intrinsic to her cult's longevity.

Despite the diverse nature of the sources introduced here, the analysis of the evidence of Æthelthryth's cult from the three centuries following the production of the *LE* provides a view of how it evolved from a localised, albeit very powerful, East Anglian cult, to a much more widespread and influential one by the middle of the fifteenth century. The information from the calendars and the relic lists demonstrates how recognition of the power of Æthelthryth's shrine was used by ecclesiastical centres across England to generate pilgrimage to their own shrines through the (sometimes dubious) claimed accumulation of her relics. During the same period, hagiographers of Æthelthryth were continuing to manipulate and reinvent her character to suit the message they were trying to convey and the audience for which they were writing. The relics, story, and portrayal of Æthelthryth in the late Middle Ages were tools that monastic institutions used to achieve their own objectives, and which in turn served to promote and extend the power and influence of her cult.

## **The Widening of Knowledge of Æthelthryth's Cult – Ecclesiastical Calendars and Litanies**

There are three feast days that pertain to anniversaries with significance to Æthelthryth: her death on 23 June; the translations of her relics on 17 October (two of which are recorded as occurring on this date);<sup>2</sup> and the Octave, or eighth day after her translation, on the 24 October. On these dates, in the monasteries and abbeys where her cult had been recognised, excerpts from the story of her life would have been narrated, and prayers invoking her intercession would have been recited. The reminder to the monks that this type of venerative activity should have taken place was an entry on an ecclesiastical calendar for the particular feast day to be celebrated, and the calendars that still exist today provide an insight into the popularity and geographical extent of her cult at the time they were being used. The ecclesiastical calendars containing entries for the feast days of Æthelthryth that have been identified as having had their origins in the Winchester scriptorium of Æthelwold in the tenth and eleventh century have been shown to be evidence of the earliest substantial dissemination of knowledge of her cult since its inception three centuries earlier. Æthelthryth is included in a total of twenty extant calendars datable to before the Norman Conquest, with the locations of their production mirroring the progression of the reforms to abbeys of the south and east of England as they were converted to the Rule of St Benedict.<sup>3</sup> The extant English calendars from the three centuries following the writing of the *LE* show that their production continued at a fairly uniform rate during this time and that they represented a wide cross-section of the major Benedictine foundations of the period (see Figures 18 and 19, below).

In total, amalgamating the pre- and post-Conquest data, sixty-two manuscripts exist, originating from eighteen different English locations. As would be expected from the major English

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<sup>2</sup> The first of these was in 695, and is described in Chapter 1, pp. 45-52, above, while the other took place in 1106, three years before the creation of the bishopric of Ely, see Chapter 3, pp. 137-139, above. The date of her second translation by Æthelwold, in 970, has not been documented.

<sup>3</sup> The impact of the inclusion of Æthelthryth in these calendars is discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 110-114, above.

scriptoria, the most prolific foundations were Canterbury, St Albans, Winchester, and Ely itself, accounting for thirty-seven, or sixty per cent, of the total number.<sup>4</sup> The geographical spread of the institutions that recognised Æthelthryth in their calendars is not particularly surprising, covering as it does much of the south of the country, the Midlands, and East Anglia. Foundations in the vicinity of Ely are well-represented, with the Lincolnshire abbey of Crowland's two calendars containing three instances of Æthelthryth, those of St Neot's in Cambridgeshire containing another three, and St Albans, Bury St Edmunds, Peterborough, and Deeping in Lincolnshire, containing a further two each.

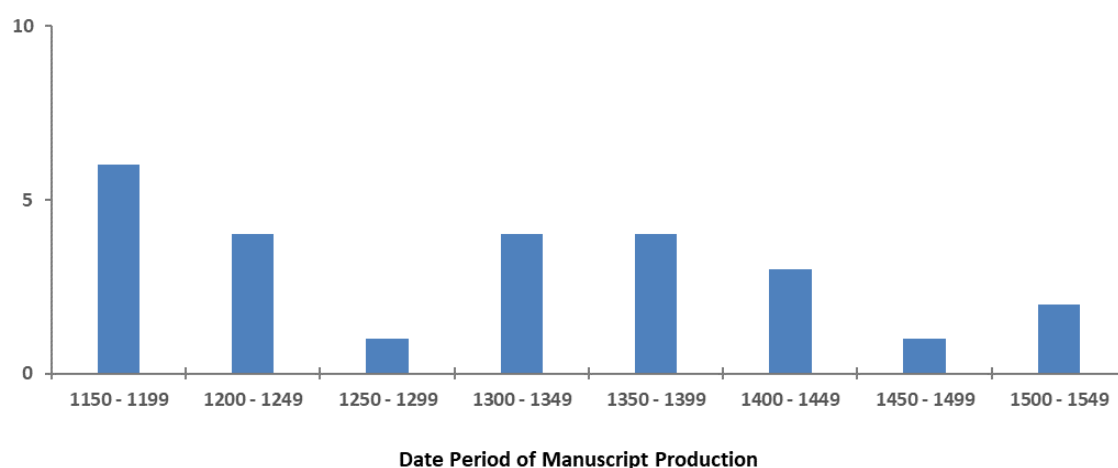


Figure 18. English Calendars of St Æthelthryth Produced after 1150.

<sup>4</sup> Figures calculated from a combination of Rushforth, *Saints in English Kalendars Before A.D. 1100*, Tables I to XII, and Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars After A.D. 1100*, vols. 1 and 2.

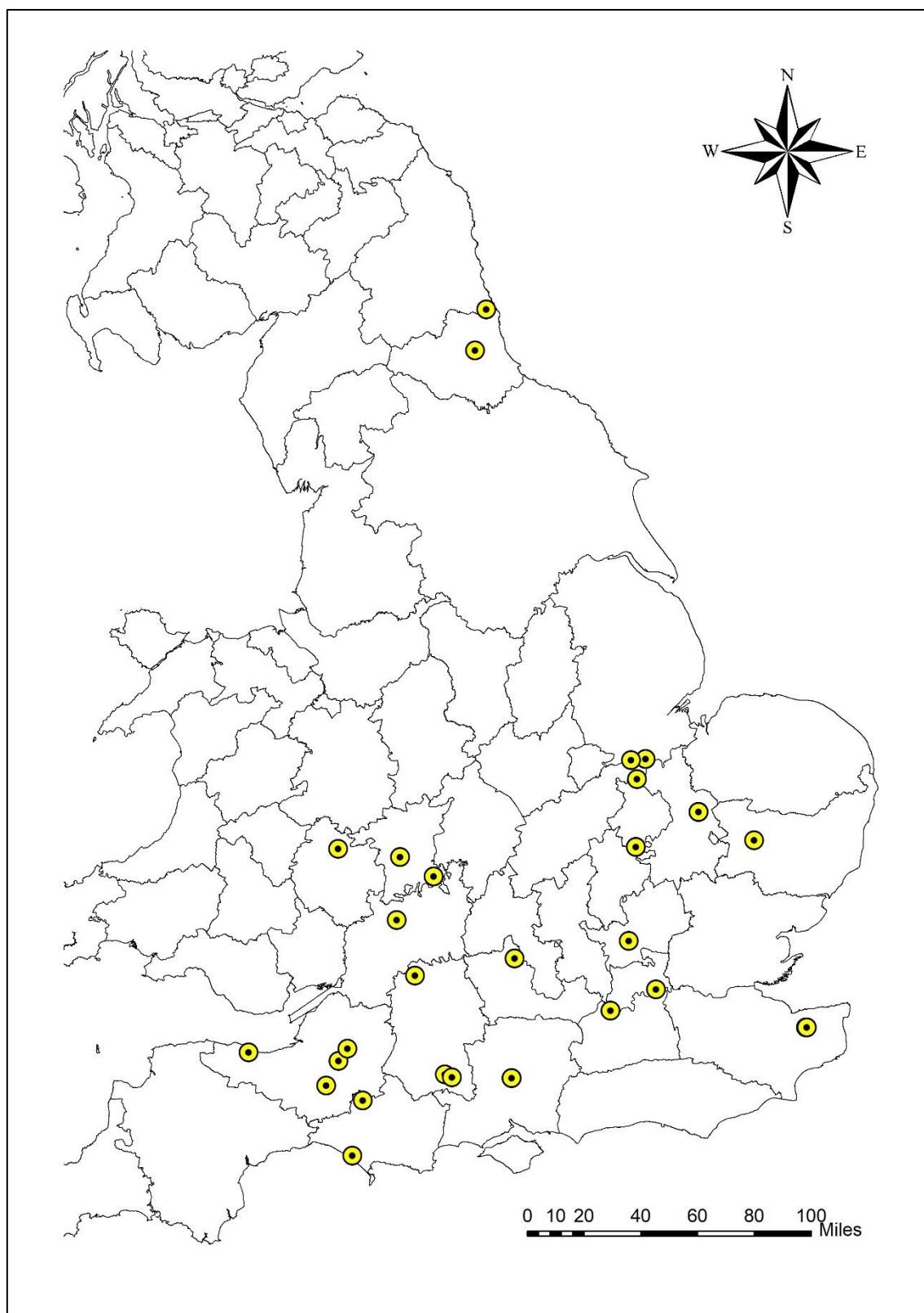


Figure 19. Origins of Manuscripts Containing Calendar Entries for St Æthelthryth. (Both pre- and post-Conquest calendars are shown).

Two locations that appear anomalous when compared to the others are those to be found at the far north of the map in Figure 19. Definitely one, and potentially both of these relate to a calendar that originated from the scriptorium of Durham Cathedral Priory around 1170 as part of a psalter that was one of a number produced by the Durham community earlier in the twelfth century.<sup>5</sup> Æthelthryth's links with northern England were strong and originated from her second marriage, to Ecgfrith, king of the Northumbrians, and her short spell at the priory in Coldingham before she left for Ely in 672.<sup>6</sup> It is almost certain that the priory in Durham would have held copies of compendia of saints' lives in its extensive library and so her inclusion in a Norman calendar from there is not surprising.

The distribution of calendars dating from prior to the Norman Conquest is aligned with that of the Benedictine abbeys that were founded following the reforms of the tenth century, and this is a pattern that is continued when the calendars from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries are included. It appears that the celebration of Æthelthryth's life and example that was introduced by Æthelwold into the reformed foundations of the tenth century was a tradition that was sustained into the later Middle Ages, with evidence of the commemoration of her feast days prevalent in the calendars of many of the Benedictine institutions founded during this period.

The evidence of venerative activity discovered through the study of the ecclesiastical calendars has been augmented by the information provided by the analysis of the proliferation of Æthelthryth's name in extant litanies.<sup>7</sup> While those from prior to the Norman Conquest have

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<sup>5</sup> The manuscript is Cambridge, Jesus College, MS Q.B.6. Wormald's dating of this manuscript is through a combination of palaeographical comparison with others from the same period and origin, and the years of death or translation of saints included within it. Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars After A.D. 1100*, vol. 1, pp. 166 and 175. Anne Lawrence-Mathers points to the development of Durham as a centre for manuscript production from the early twelfth century, see Anne Lawrence-Mathers, *Manuscripts in Northumbria in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 65-66.

<sup>6</sup> Her flight from Coldingham is described in *LE(B)*, Book I, chs. 8-11, pp. 20-28.

<sup>7</sup> The purposes of litanies and the presence of Æthelthryth within those datable to before the Norman Conquest has been discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 114-117, above.

been documented and analysed by Michael Lapidge,<sup>8</sup> those from after 1100 are very poorly catalogued, with the only volumes containing details of the manuscripts having been collated by Nigel Morgan, the first of which covers foundations from Abbotsbury to Peterborough, with the second covering Pontefract to York.<sup>9</sup> A third volume that was to provide useful summary information for the saints named within them was planned but has not yet been forthcoming. Combining the information from both Lapidge's and Morgan's volumes (i.e. the pre- and post-Conquest data) results in a total of 174 manuscripts from fifty-eight discrete locations, of which Æthelthryth appears in 113 originating from thirty-seven locations. This means that she featured in just over seventy per cent of the locations identified as producing litanies, which is in contrast to the calendar data where Æthelthryth appears in manuscripts from all but one of the locations identified. This distinction between them holds true for the majority of other saints as well though, and so this is a phenomenon that relates to the way that saints in general were chosen for the litany, and not specifically in relation to Æthelthryth. The production of ecclesiastical calendars tended to be concentrated into fewer, larger foundations whereas litany production was more widespread, which meant a greater number of the names of more local saints were included in the litanies. The chronological profile of the production of the litany manuscripts containing Æthelthryth's name, as shown in Figure 20, below, is a broadly even one, although with significantly fewer litanies being produced in the twelfth century compared with the eleventh, thirteenth, fourteenth, or fifteenth. Again, this was a pattern that applied to all litany production, and not just that of those containing Æthelthryth, which points to a general reduction in their production in the century after the Norman Conquest, rather than any change in attitudes at this time towards the cult of Æthelthryth. The peak in the first half of the fourteenth century is explained by a proliferation of litanies produced by the scriptoria of

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<sup>8</sup> See Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*.

<sup>9</sup> Nigel J Morgan, *English Monastic Litanies of the Saints After 1100, vol. 1, Abbotsbury - Peterborough* (London 2012), and Nigel J Morgan, *English Monastic Litanies of the Saints After 1100, vol. 2, Pontefract - York* (London 2013).

Norwich (with four out of its total of nine manuscripts produced during this period) and Peterborough (three out of a total of eight). Activity from Norwich in particular seems to be limited to the fourteenth century as a whole.

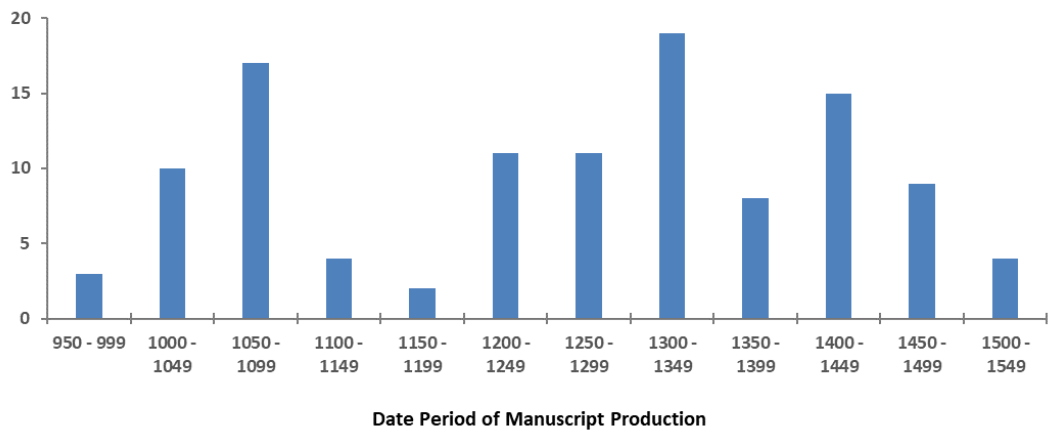


Figure 20. The Numbers of Occurrences of St Æthelthryth in English Litanies.

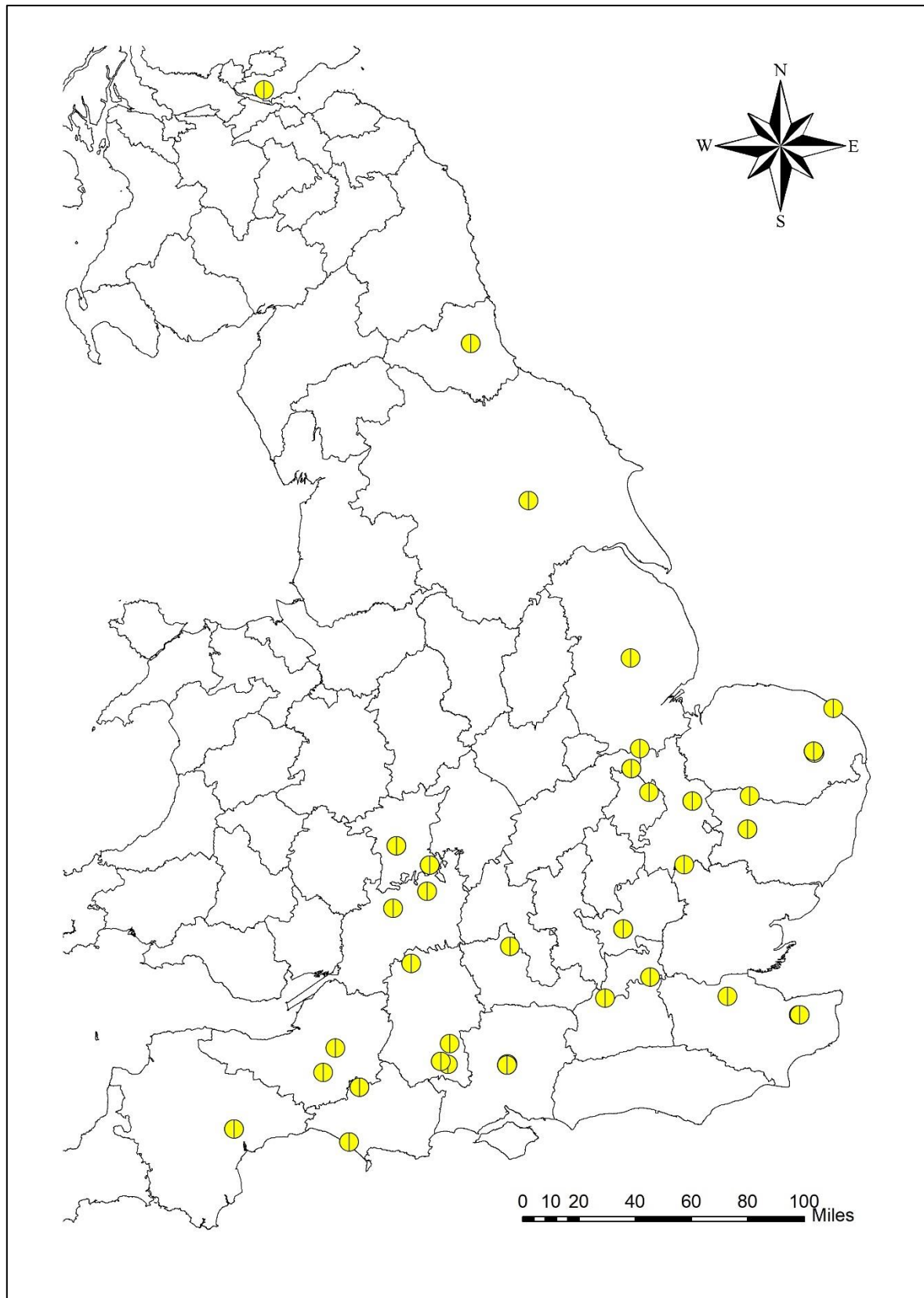


Figure 21. Origins of Manuscripts Containing Litanies Naming St Æthelthryth.



Despite the greater number of locations producing litanies, the geographical spread of the manuscripts' origins is broadly similar to that of the calendars, covering much of the south and east of the country (see Figure 21, above). The principal English scriptoria again account for a large number of the manuscripts produced, and those from Canterbury and Winchester alone contain thirty references to Æthelthryth, so over a quarter of the total.<sup>10</sup> Again, there are some isolated northern examples, including one late fifteenth-century example from Dunfermline Abbey.<sup>11</sup> This litany is contained in a psalter that was produced for Richard de Bothwell, Abbot of Dunfermline from 1445-1470, as stated in an inscription on the first folio, and which was donated to Capucin Monastery, Boulogne, in the early eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, no specific identifiable link between either de Bothwell or Dunfermline and Ely, and therefore the choice of Æthelthryth as a saint in the litany is probably more a reflection of how generally widespread knowledge of her cult was in the fifteenth century.

The calendrical and litany evidence described here suggests that Æthelthryth was one of a tier of saints venerated in England in the Middle Ages whose popularity ranked behind that of nationally and internationally renowned English saints such as St Thomas of Canterbury, St Edmund, and St Alban. She did not appear in every calendar or litany, and those in which she had been included tended to have originated from the south and east of England, in the vicinity of Ely, and primarily in the Benedictine monasteries that proliferated throughout this part of the country. Æthelthryth's presence in ecclesiastical calendars and litanies is not evidence that the foundations from which they had originated were actively promoting her cult. It does, however, show that her feast days were being celebrated and that her intercession (along with that of all the other saints included in the litanies) was being invoked in prayers. The number of instances

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<sup>10</sup> The other foundations and their totals are as follows (the numbers in brackets represent the numbers of those that name Æthelthryth as one of the saints): St Albans, 11 (8); Norwich, 9 (9); Peterborough, 8 (8) and Worcester, 8 (6); Bury St Edmunds, 5 (5) and Exeter, 5 (3); Ely, 4 (4).

<sup>11</sup> Boulogne, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 92.

<sup>12</sup> N F Donald, *Literary Treasures of Dunfermline Abbey* (Dunfermline, 2013), p. 7.

that Æthelthryth's name appears within the calendars and litanies is an indication of her popularity within the Benedictine foundations but is not necessarily a sign of her influence or of the potential for her name to attract pilgrims. By the thirteenth century, promotion of the cult of Æthelthryth was still largely confined to East Anglia and the vicinity of the shrine at Ely. The calendrical and litany information does provide evidence of the geographical extent of knowledge of her cult, however, and it has revealed that this knowledge was not confined to England but had spread into Scandinavia within a century of the Norman Conquest.

### **Evidence of Æthelthryth in Scandinavia**

In much the same way that the Munich calendar fragment demonstrated an early link with Francia, calendrical evidence also shows that familiarity with Æthelthryth's cult had reached Scandinavia by the middle of the twelfth century. In total, fragments of twenty-seven calendars containing commemorative dates for Æthelthryth have been identified in manuscripts located in Scandinavia, of which sixteen are thought to have originated there, nine are probably of English origin, and two where the origin is unknown.<sup>13</sup> One of these fragments, an early twelfth century manuscript that was found in Norway but actually originated from Crowland Abbey in Lincolnshire, was investigated in more detail by Lilli Gjerløw in the 1950s, and she comments on the eleventh-century missionary journeys to Scandinavia, and particularly to Norway and Sweden, from what she refers to as the 'mother church' in England.<sup>14</sup> The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw the introduction of the Christian faith into Scandinavia, with bishoprics being established initially in Lund in Sweden and Nidaros in Norway by the early 1100s. The introduction of Norman and Frankish religious practices meant that the celebration of saints'

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<sup>13</sup> These calendars have been collated and published by John Toy, see John Toy, ed., *English Saints in the Medieval Liturgies of Scandinavian Churches* (London, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Lilli Gjerløw, 'Fragment of a Twelfth-Century Croyland Calendar Found in Norway', *Nordisk Tidskrift för Bok- och Biblioteksväsen*, 45 (1958), p. 105. The manuscript is Oslo, Riksarkivet, Gj Kal 2.

feast days became an integral part of the Scandinavian church calendar. However, the absence of home-grown saints at this time meant that the adoption of figures from the countries whose missionaries had brought Christianity became commonplace. Æthelthryth was one of these saints, and she appears in the calendars and litanies originating from all the major Scandinavian religious centres of the Middle Ages, with the half-century following the Norman Conquest containing the most activity. Of particular interest in relation to Æthelthryth is the exile of Archbishop Øystein, the archbishop of Nidaros, the principal medieval see of Norway in the twelfth century, to England between 1180 and 1183. He is recorded as having stayed for a number of months in the abbot's house at Bury St Edmunds during this time, as well as visiting other East Anglian foundations, before returning to Norway.<sup>15</sup> Aside from the manuscript fragment discussed above, three other calendars of the same period have been associated with the foundation at Nidaros, and it is possible that the archbishop's stay in England could have fomented the links between Norway and East Anglia.

Tracing the locations and time periods of the origins of the calendars and litanies that contain references to Æthelthryth shows that their disbursement mirrors the development of the Scandinavian Christian church (see Figure 22, below). The geographical distribution of the locations of the manuscripts reveals a pattern that charts the gradual expansion of knowledge of Æthelthryth through Scandinavia, and which to a certain extent reflects the spread of Christianity throughout the region from the twelfth century onwards.

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<sup>15</sup> Øystein's stay at Bury St Edmunds is recorded in a contemporary chronicle written by one of the foundation's monks, Jocelyn de Brakelond, see L C Lane, ed., *The Chronicle of Jocelyn of Brakelond, Monk of St Edmundsbury: A Picture of Monastic Life in the XIIth Century* (London, 1907), p. 23.

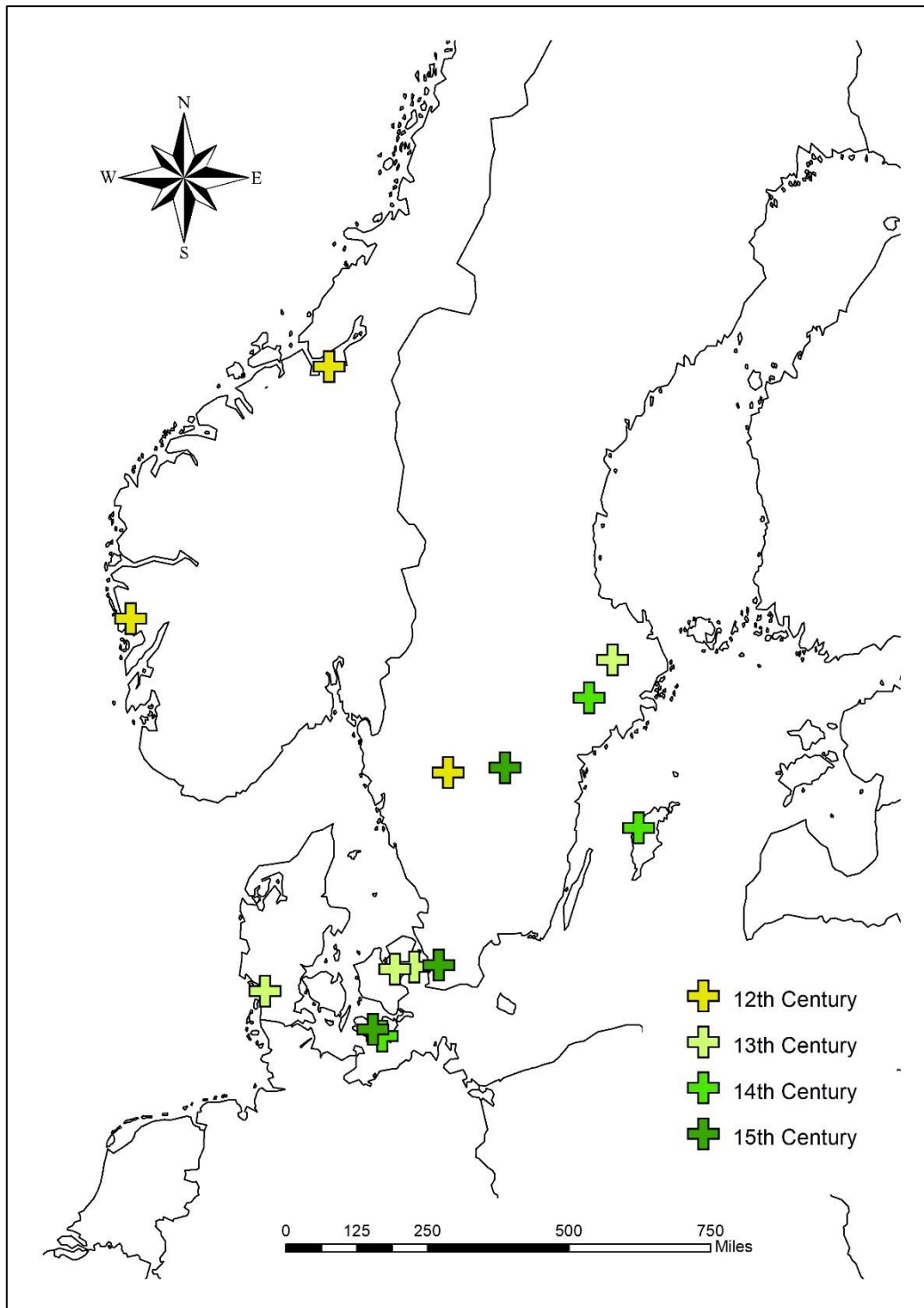


Figure 22. The Locations of Scandinavian Calendars and Litanies Containing References to St Æthelthryth.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> After Toy, ed., *English Saints in the Medieval Liturgies of Scandinavian Churches*.

The earliest manuscripts, dating from before 1150, relate to Nidaros in Norway and Lund in Sweden,<sup>17</sup> which were the two most important religious centres in Scandinavia at the time. Nidaros (now Trondheim) is the resting place of the relics of the most venerated saint in Norway, St Olaf, whose martyrdom in 1030 is said to have been the catalyst for Norway's conversion to Christianity, and it was established as the country's first archbishopric in 1152 or 1153. Within fifty years of the see's foundation, its liturgical calendars contained more than one hundred and fifty saints, of whom Æthelthryth was one, having been identified in four extant manuscripts to date.<sup>18</sup> Lund's Christian history stretches back even further, and it was declared the archbishopric of all Scandinavia in 1103, although the city's foremost status at this time belies the rate at which Christianisation of the rest of the country progressed.<sup>19</sup> Lund is situated geographically in the far south of Sweden, and its conversion to Christianity was influenced far more from Germany than by England and Normandy.<sup>20</sup> While bishoprics were established in several areas in the subsequent decades, of which three, Skara, Uppsala, and Strängnäs, have been identified as the locations of calendars containing entries for Æthelthryth, reform outside of these centres was much slower and disjointed. Again, the calendars reflect this progression, with those from Strängnäs, Gotland, and Vadstena dating from the fourteenth century. The majority of Danish calendars containing entries for Æthelthryth date from the thirteenth century, with three of the seven examples originating from the diocese of Ribe, in southwest Denmark. While Christianisation of Denmark dates back to the mid-eleventh century with the

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<sup>17</sup> The manuscripts are Oslo, Riksarkivet, Gj Kal 2 (the Crowland Abbey manuscript, see above) and Lund, University Library, Mh 6 Kal.

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed account of the martyrdom of Olaf and the development of Nidaros as the primary religious centre in Norway, see Sverre Bagge and Sæbjørg W Nordeide, 'The Kingdom of Norway', in N. Berend, ed., *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 144-151, and Åslaug Ommundsen, 'The Cult of Saints in Norway Before 1200', in H. Antonsson and I. H. Garipzanov, eds., *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (c. 1000-1200)* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 67-71.

<sup>19</sup> Nils Blomkvist, et al., 'The Kingdom of Sweden', in N. Berend, ed., *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 185-186.

<sup>20</sup> Haki Antonsson and Ildar H Garipzanov, 'Introduction: The Veneration of Saints in Early Christian Scandinavia and Eastern Europe', in H. Antonsson and I. H. Garipzanov, eds., *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (c. 1000-1200)* (Turnhout, 2010), p. 6.

establishment of four dioceses, of which Ribe was one, the English connection persisted for at least the next two centuries, and the calendars containing Æthelthryth were almost certainly compiled from a thirteenth-century martyrology that also was written at Ribe, but that was probably copied from an earlier version from the New Minster at Winchester.<sup>21</sup>

The date ranges of the production of the Scandinavian calendars do support the assertion by Toy that the connections established between England and Scandinavia in the eleventh century continued through the following centuries,<sup>22</sup> with evidence of calendars containing entries for Æthelthryth being collated right through to the Reformation. Also, the number of instances of Æthelthryth appearing in these calendars shows that knowledge of her cult was being disseminated in Scandinavia throughout this period, at least in the major religious centres of the region. Evidence of it spreading into the areas outside of the bishoprics and archbishoprics is, however, non-existent, although information on Scandinavian church dedications is very difficult to obtain. Of the only data available, which is limited to approximately one quarter of the estimated 1200 medieval Norwegian churches, as many as sixty saints are represented of which eight are English, although Æthelthryth is not among them.<sup>23</sup> Æthelthryth's presence in the calendars of the larger religious institutions and her absence from the church dedications of the smaller, local churches could point to a more localised network of cults in medieval Scandinavia, with veneration or commemoration of foreign saints restricted to the religious centres. This however is conjecture based on limited information and more data is needed, not least from Sweden and Denmark, before any firmer conclusions can be drawn.

However, what has become apparent from the calendrical evidence is that Æthelthryth was chosen as one of a number of Anglo-Saxon saints whose life and example were used within the

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<sup>21</sup> Michael H Gelting, 'The Kingdom of Denmark', in N. Berend, ed., *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 100-101.

<sup>22</sup> Toy, ed., *English Saints in the Medieval Liturgies of Scandinavian Churches*, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Pernille H Fredriksen, 'Helgener og Kirkededikasjoner i Norge i Middelalderen' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Oslo, 2004), p. 137.

principal religious centres to ensure the spread of Christianity and the education of the monastic community into Scandinavia. Based on the evidence of calendars and litanies alone her cult cannot be labelled a truly international one, a characterisation that would have been more appropriate had there been evidence of pilgrimage from abroad to her shrine at Ely, or the discovery of churches dedicated to her outside of the British Isles. It is, however, irrefutable that knowledge of her did spread across into Europe and endured throughout the Middle Ages.

### **The Power of the (Real or False) Relics of Æthelthryth**

Calendars and litanies were a way of introducing the story of a saint into an institution, and the proliferation throughout the Middle Ages of those that commemorated Æthelthryth is proof that the story of her life and her example was being told in a significant number of Benedictine foundations. However, these narratives alone were not enough to attract visitors to the cathedrals and abbeys. The physical relics of a saint, on the other hand, contained a far greater perceived power. Relics were tangible objects, able to be seen and touched, and which visitors to their shrines believed held curative properties. Records of the foundations that claimed to hold relics of Æthelthryth exist in the relic lists that have survived to the present day. While none of the claims of possession of relics of Æthelthryth can be fully authenticated – and in some cases they appear to be blatantly false – together they are an indication of the extent of the active promotion of her cult in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Of the half dozen or so locations whose lists contained details of a relic of Æthelthryth, those having claimed to be in possession of secondary or contact relics, such as fragments of her burial dress or shroud, or pieces of wood from her coffin, tend to be more verifiable. The basis for all the claims is discussed here in conjunction with any supporting textual evidence, of which there is some for the secondary relics. In a number of cases, the sites claiming to hold relics of Æthelthryth were also those within whose ecclesiastical calendars she appeared. It is likely,

therefore, that on her feast days, visitors would have been able to see and touch her relics while also hearing her story. This combination of sensory experiences would have had a profound effect, one about which those administering the shrine would have known and have orchestrated.

The opportunity for a pilgrim to have been able to see and touch the relics of a saint was obviously dependent upon the foundation having physically obtained them in the first place. A growing trade in relics in the Middle Ages meant that they became a very profitable commodity to the institutions that had acquired them.<sup>24</sup> They were also used to build networks between churches and to help establish newly founded institutions by being given as gifts or endowments,<sup>25</sup> as well as becoming the target of relic theft, a topic that Patrick Geary addresses so thoroughly.<sup>26</sup> A not-uncommon feature of the translation of a saint's relics was the separation of fragments from the main set of remains. This was based on the belief that each distinct fragment of the body of the saint maintained the same degree of holiness and potency as the whole, and that the saint's identity and spirit remained intact within the individual pieces, a theory known as *pars pro toto*.<sup>27</sup> For instance, the remains of St Remigius of Reims (died 533) were distributed to various churches in the region, making them available to a much greater number of penitents than if they were confined to one location,<sup>28</sup> while the head of St Hugh of Lincoln (died 1200) was separated from his body, apparently as a method of doubling the relic's value.<sup>29</sup> The belief that separating whole or fragments of bones did not affect the power that

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<sup>24</sup> James Bentley, *Restless Bones: The Story of Relics* (London, 1985), p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> See Geary, *Furta Sacra*, especially chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>27</sup> See Virginia Reinburg, 'Remembering the Saints', in N. Netzer and V. Reinburg, eds., *Memory and the Middle Ages* (Boston, 1995), p.26, and Julia M H Smith, 'Rulers and Relics c. 750 - c. 950: Treasure on Earth, Treasure in Heaven', in A. Walsham, ed., *Relics and Remains* (Oxford, 2010), p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Bentley, *Restless Bones*, p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.



the relics contained meant that their dispersal was a widespread phenomenon throughout the Middle Ages.

Apart from the perceived power that relic fragments contained, there was nothing to differentiate them from other material objects, and for their spiritual value to remain with them as they were circulated, authentication, whether oral or written, was needed as reinforcement.<sup>30</sup> The traditions surrounding the saint and the miracles they had purportedly performed were the measures that were important for the relic's recipient foundation. Igor Kopytoff's notion of tracing the 'careers' or life-cycles of objects to understand their significance has been applied by Geary to the dispersal of relics,<sup>31</sup> and the application of this theory is very apt. The perceived power of the relic would have grown and receded as it changed hands, and its new owners would have had to reinvigorate interest in it through the promotion of the saint's traditions and healing capabilities. Evidence of the circulation of relic fragments occurs in relic lists that were compiled by the foundations collecting them, and the lists proliferated in England right across the Middle Ages, with the earliest ones dating from the twelfth century. They tended to be incorporated within the financial records of the religious house, sometimes featuring within the cartulary, and were an expression both of the wealth of the foundation and of its prestige, as they provided a means of advertising the identities of the most well-known and effective saints held in their collections.<sup>32</sup>

The occasion of the opening of Æthelthryth's tomb and the translation of her corpse in 695 by her sister and successor as abbess, Seaxburh, proved to be the springboard by which the remains of Æthelthryth were transformed into the relics of Æthelthryth. Despite there being no narrative telling of how any primary relics of Æthelthryth were ever moved away from Ely,

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<sup>30</sup> Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> Geary, *The Cultural Biography of Things*, pp. 187-188. For more detail on Kopytoff's theory of the biography of material objects, see Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in *ibid.*, pp. 64-92.

<sup>32</sup> Islwyn G Thomas, 'The Cult of Saints' Relics in Medieval England' (London, 1974), p. 44.

several other major religious houses claimed that they were the custodians of her relic fragments. Similarly, and more believably, a number of other lists provide evidence that contact or secondary relics with claimed curative powers were also the subjects of veneration at locations outside Ely. These lists date from around 1200 through to the mid-sixteenth century, and occasionally where multiple lists exist from a single location, entries relating to her relics appear more than once, providing a minimum timespan for when the saint was considered an important addition to that foundation's collection. Since surviving relic lists are scarce and were an inventory at a point in time, a saint's appearance on them does not necessarily represent the date the relic was obtained, but instead provides the *terminus ante quem* for its acquisition.

The earliest entry for which a record of Æthelthryth's relics exists is contained in a list from Waltham Abbey in Essex. It was originally produced as part of an exercise to catalogue the abbey's entire collection of relics, and has been dated to 1204 but refers to a number of items that were already in the collection by 1177.<sup>33</sup> The Waltham Abbey list is one of the most comprehensive of the English inventories, and benefits from added authenticity as in some cases the name of the donor is provided alongside that of the saint whose relics were reported as being held there.<sup>34</sup> This does not hold true for that of Æthelthryth, however, as her entry simply reads '*atheldrithe sacra*' ('sacred Æthelthryth') without stating the nature of the relic fragment or its donor.<sup>35</sup> Two more pre-fourteenth-century lists are those of York and Glastonbury, although authentication of their collections is problematic to say the least. The York list, the date of which can only be approximated to the early thirteenth century, itemises its collection in groups based on the containers that held them, with Æthelthryth's entry appearing alongside those of several other English saints including St Edward the Martyr (king of

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<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Rogers, 'The Waltham Abbey Relic Lists', in C. Hicks, ed., *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford, Connecticut, 1992), p. 158. The relic list has also been reproduced in full in this edition.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, 'The Cult of Saints' Relics in Medieval England', pp. 257-258.

<sup>35</sup> Rogers, *The Waltham Abbey Relic Lists*, p. 171.

England, reigned 975-978), St Ælfheah of Canterbury (died 1012), and St Birinus of Winchester (died 649).<sup>36</sup>

Glastonbury Abbey has the greatest number of surviving relic lists, four in total, with the earliest the work of William of Malmesbury sometime before 1250, and the others, all of which were compiled during the following century, probably being copies of the first incorporating details of any additional relics acquired in the intervening time.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, despite the number of lists that survive, the claims that Glastonbury made regarding the volume and identities of relics they held were probably the most dubious, especially with regard to the three later lists that were based on William's pre-1250 inventory. William recorded forty-seven saints' names, a significant number but not completely implausible when compared with other foundations from a similar time. However, by c.1270 (the date of the second list) this number had risen to nearly three hundred, while the third from approximately seventy years later contains around four hundred and fifty saints' names.<sup>38</sup> The monks of Glastonbury Abbey had a reputation for conveniently discovering new relics at times of crisis, including those of St Dunstan which were apparently revealed intact in their hiding place following a disastrous fire in 1148.<sup>39</sup> Further doubt as to the efficacy of Glastonbury's claims is cast by the absence of narrative references to the saints whose relics are listed in the inventories in William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century *On the Antiquity of Glastonbury Church* or any of his other *Histories*. Had a relic of Æthelthryth's been present in Glastonbury's collection, it is implausible that there would have been no mention of her within William's texts, and yet her story is absent from them all.<sup>40</sup> The only other relic list that contains an entry for Æthelthryth is that of Salisbury and is of a much later

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas, 'The Cult of Saints' Relics in Medieval England', p. 146.

<sup>37</sup> James P Carley and Martin Howley, 'Relics at Glastonbury in the Fourteenth Century: An Annotated Edition of British Library, Cotton Titus D.vii, fols. 2r-13v', in J. P. Carley, ed., *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 569-570.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 574-575.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 574.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Rahtz and Lorna Watts, *Glastonbury: Myth and Archaeology* (Stroud, 2003), p. 65.

date. The extant manuscript is a catalogue of relics from 1536, but Islwyn Thomas has suggested that this is a copy of a now-lost inventory dating from the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>41</sup> As there is no record of the saints listed in the earlier manuscript, it is impossible to ascertain whether Æthelthryth's name appeared on it (she is included within a generic list of twenty-six virgin saints in the 1536 catalogue), which makes any attempt at verification of Salisbury's claim more difficult.

In fact, the veracity of the assertions of all the foundations whose lists contained entries identifying Æthelthryth's relics is questionable. Despite the physical transfer of a saint's corpse into a new tomb being a common feature of medieval translations, the only recorded instance of this being the case for Æthelthryth's remains was her first translation by Seaxburh in 695. Neither Bede's account nor that contained in the *LE* mention any attempt by the Ely nuns to separate her relics before the body was washed and re-clothed prior to being placed in the new sarcophagus.<sup>42</sup> In neither of the two subsequent ceremonies of 970 and 1106 is the tomb of the saint even opened, and a common theme throughout the hagiographic narratives of Æthelthryth is the inviolable nature of the coffin containing her relics. During the translation enacted by Æthelwold in 970, the *LE* says specifically that the bishop 'left her with the greatest certitude unexamined and uninspected ... And it accrued to her greater glory that no one presumed to open her tomb and look inside.'<sup>43</sup> So adamant was the saint that she was not going to be disturbed, she meted out severe punishments to anyone who tried to interfere with her tomb, with the most well-known retributive action dispensed to the Viking raider who, after attacking the sarcophagus with an axe, was killed and his eyes torn from his head.<sup>44</sup> Many years

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<sup>41</sup> The 1536 list has been reproduced in Christopher Wordsworth, ed., *Ceremonies and Processions of the Cathedral Church of Salisbury* (Cambridge, 1901), pp. 33-40. See Thomas, 'The Cult of Saints' Relics in Medieval England', p. 130, for his evidence of an earlier list.

<sup>42</sup> See *HE*, Book 4, ch. 19, pp. 396-397 and *LE(B)*, Book I, chs. 27 and 28, pp. 44-47. Both accounts stress that Æthelthryth's body remained intact.

<sup>43</sup> '*quam certissime intentatum et inconspicuum ... Et quidem hoc illi ad maiorem gloriam accrescit, quod nemo ipsius tumbam pandere, nemo inspicere presumptit*', *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 52, p. 120.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. 41, pp. 55-56.

later, Ælfhelm, the unfortunate cleric who pushed a candle into the hole made by the raider's axe, was paralysed and his family killed,<sup>45</sup> and there are numerous other examples where reference is made to the sanctity of the tomb. There is no mention in any of Æthelthryth's *vitae* of any separation of her relics, or even of the opportunity for this to have happened, which brings into question the claims made by Waltham Abbey, York, and Glastonbury that they were the recipients of fragmentary relics of the saint. There is a slim possibility that the cathedral at Salisbury could have received a relic of Æthelthryth subsequent to her remains being separated at the Reformation in the 1530s, but only if Salisbury's 1536 relic catalogue was the first to include an entry for her, and if the remains were dispersed extremely quickly after Thomas Cromwell's Dissolution of the Monasteries Act of the same year. Some records imply that the monastery at Ely continued until 1539 or maybe even a year or two later, in which case Salisbury's claim of holding a relic of Æthelthryth can also probably be discounted.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the serious doubts as to whether primary relics of Æthelthryth were to be found in any monastic institutions other than Ely, the fact remains that the abbots and bishops of these foundations felt that she was sufficiently influential to be included within their lists of relics (even if, as in Glastonbury's case, she was just one saint out of a total of up to four hundred and fifty!). Furthermore, in the locations where more than one inventory exists, the biography of these items, to use Kopytoff's terminology, stretched out over decades and sometimes centuries, aided no doubt by the reliquaries that contained them, which both obscured them from view – a necessary attribute if they were of dubious provenance or even non-existent –

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Book I, ch. 49, pp. 60-61.

<sup>46</sup> See Owen, *Ely 1109-1539: Priory, Community and Town*, pp. 74-75 for an account of the years leading up to the Dissolution.

while at the same time portraying a representation of power and spirituality through their decoration and positioning.<sup>47</sup>

The transmission of the power of the relic was not limited to the bones of the saint, but also extended to items with which they had come into contact, such as articles of clothing, pieces of property, letters, or even earth or stones that were said to have been touched by the saint; so-called secondary relics.<sup>48</sup> Geary's notion that the life-cycle of the relic reveals the fluctuations in its power, and that the actions of the relics' recipients influenced visitors' perceptions of that power, is if anything even more appropriate to secondary relics, as they were almost always separated from the saints' remains and distributed to other churches and monasteries. Since for the most part they were everyday material objects, indistinguishable from any other, they possibly lacked the impact of the relic of a skull or a hand.<sup>49</sup> In order to counteract the risk that the secondary relics' potency could have been diminished through their unexceptional nature, they tended to be housed in ornate reliquaries, sometimes amalgamated with other sacred items, and could be imbued with very specific healing properties,<sup>50</sup> characteristics that were as applicable to the secondary relics of Æthelthryth as they were to those of any other saint.

Three locations claimed to be in possession of secondary relics of Æthelthryth, of which the earliest is that of Thetford. Its relic catalogue of 1368 lists amongst its many items the smock of St Etheldreda, and the item also appears in a papal register of 1403 and again in a later list of 1501, and was said to be particularly successful in curing toothache and throat ailments.<sup>51</sup> Three lists also survive from Durham, although it is only latest one, dating from 1383, on which

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<sup>47</sup> Cynthia Hahn discusses the aesthetics and symbolism of reliquaries and their decoration, see Cynthia Hahn, 'What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?', *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*, 57 (2010).

<sup>48</sup> Alexandra Walsham, 'Introduction: Relics and Remains', in A. Walsham, ed., *Relics and Remains* (Oxford, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Smith says that secondary relics' amorphous nature could jeopardise their religious significance, see Julia M H Smith, *Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c. 700-1200)* (London, 2012), p. 152.

<sup>50</sup> Walsham, *Introduction*, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas, 'The Cult of Saints' Relics in Medieval England', pp. 288-289.

Æthelthryth is mentioned. It contains an entry describing a stole of the saint that was said to have been donated to St Wilfrid,<sup>52</sup> which is very informative in determining the date the item was first appropriated. Wilfrid was an influential figure in the life of Æthelthryth, and was responsible for, among other things, providing evidence of her virginity and for her consecration as abbess at Ely.<sup>53</sup> He is also recorded as being present at Æthelthryth's translation, one of the few attendees who is mentioned by name,<sup>54</sup> and so the donation to him of the dress that the saint was wearing when her body was found to be incorrupt and intact becomes more plausible. The relic's whereabouts in the seven centuries prior to its arrival in Durham, however, remains a mystery. The final set of secondary relics appear in the lists of the church of St Olave at Herringfleet in Suffolk, which was said to have been in possession of a wimple, a comb, and a ring that had belonged to Æthelthryth.<sup>55</sup> Again, these relics contained specific healing properties, with the wimple able to help relieve sore throats and breasts, the comb providing respite from headaches, and the ring able to ease the pains of pregnancy when it was placed on the woman's finger.

On balance, the evidence supporting the claims of those institutions possessing secondary relics is more compelling than that of those purporting to hold primary relics of Æthelthryth. The descriptions of the relics themselves and their healing properties are much more detailed, while the texts that include accounts of Æthelthryth's translations provide corroboration for the claims of the dispersal of several secondary relics, but none for any separation of the remains themselves. Ultimately, though, it was the institutions' ability to convince the pilgrims who visited them that the relics they had come to see were those of the saint whose intercession

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<sup>52</sup> Surtees Society, 'Rotuli Feretrariorum, 1375-1538', in J. T. Fowler, ed., *Extracts from the Account Rolls of the Abbey of Durham from the Original MSS* (Durham, 1899), p. 433.

<sup>53</sup> *LE(B)*, Book I, chs. 12 and 16, pp. 29 and 34-35, and see Chapter 1, pp. 58-59, above, for a discussion relating to his importance as a credible witness for Bede's writing in the *HE*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. 27, p. 44.

<sup>55</sup> 'Henry VIII, February 1536, 26-29: Visitation of Monasteries', in J. Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10, January-June 1536* (London, 1887), p. 143.

they sought. The monasteries and abbeys that included relics of Æthelthryth in their inventories believed that her power was strong enough to attract visitors to the shrines containing them, and that the efforts they made in promoting the shrines were worthwhile. Of these foundations, four (York, Glastonbury, Salisbury, and Durham) were also sites where it is known from ecclesiastical calendars that Æthelthryth's feast days were celebrated. Consequently, on various days throughout the year, visitors would have been able to see and possibly touch what were purported to be the relics of St Æthelthryth while also listening to the stories of her life and miracles. Beth Williamson has suggested that the combination of sound and sight together enabled a deeper and more spiritual experience for the devotee,<sup>56</sup> while Emma Wells has shown that the architectural fabric and the decoration of the buildings were altered to enhance the sensory effect on the pilgrims that visited them.<sup>57</sup> The four sites mentioned above were all major pilgrimage destinations in their own rights, reliant on the income that was generated by the visitors, and it is completely conceivable that they would have realised the heightened sensory effect the combination of physical relics and oral narrative would have had on the pilgrims inside the building. The benefits of claiming to hold the relics of Æthelthryth, whose feast day was already being celebrated at that location, would probably have outweighed the potential recriminations should their claim have been proved to be false.

### ***La Vie Sainte Audrée – Æthelthryth as Monastic Patron***

While shrine promotion was one aspect of the harnessing and utilisation of Æthelthryth's power that was being undertaken in the later Middle Ages, the continued manipulation of her

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<sup>56</sup> Beth Williamson, 'Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion: Sound and Vision, Invisibility and Silence', *Speculum*, 88 (2013), p. 42.

<sup>57</sup> Wells uses the stained glass windows of York Minster and Canterbury Cathedral to demonstrate how the buildings were altered and the pilgrims' interactions were orchestrated to maximise their sensory experience, Emma J Wells, 'Making 'Sense' of the Pilgrimage Experience of the Medieval Church', *Peregrinations: International Society for the Study of Pilgrimage Art*, 3 (2011), pp. 122-124.



character in texts produced by monastic foundations was another. The completion of the *LE* in 1173 was the catalyst for further *vitae* to be written, each of which was produced for a specific audience and which therefore portrayed Æthelthryth in the style best suited to the aims of the authors. Lives produced until the end of the twelfth century had common threads: they had mostly either been collated at the monastery of Ely itself by resident monks (such as Gregory and Richard, authors of a twelfth-century Life and of the *LE*), or had been written by specially commissioned hagiographers (such as Ælfric and Goscelin). These *vitae* tended to emphasise Æthelthryth's virginal, benevolent, or retributive qualities. In the thirteenth century, a Life of Æthelthryth was written that did not follow the conventions characteristic of these previous narratives. The *Vie Seinte Audrée*, written in Anglo-Norman and attributable to an author named Marie, appears to have been targeted at wealthy, female residents of monastic institutions as a means of securing donations. The authorship of the work, its audience, and its circulation are discussed here as a precursor to attempting to understand its success as an incentive for acts of patronage. The published scholarship analysing the work has approached it principally from a thematic and linguistic standpoint,<sup>58</sup> and while the arguments made within these analyses are compelling in their own right, they are reinforced and given an added dimension here by the exploration of previously unidentified links between the twelfth-century text and monastic cartulary records.

Unusually, the *Vie*'s author gives her name in the final lines of the Life, ending with the words 'Here I write my name "Marie" so that I may be remembered'.<sup>59</sup> The actual identity of Marie has been the subject of scholarly debate for nearly a century, the final resolution of which has helped to establish where and when the original text was written. However, the focus on Marie's identity has meant that the question of whether the text was successful in attracting

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<sup>58</sup> The two foremost proponents of the theory that the *Vie* was written from the standpoint of patronage are Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (see Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, pp. 207-209) and Virginia Blanton (see Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 176).

<sup>59</sup> 'Ici ecris mon nom Marie, Pur ce ke soie remembree', *Vie*, lines 4624-4625, pp. 246-247.

patronage and increasing the wealth of the foundation to which it was attributed has for the most part been overlooked. The use of the cartulary records to understand the financial situations of the foundations known to have possessed copies of the *Vie* not only adds weight to the identification and authorship debate, but also shows that their wealth did indeed increase in the period subsequent to the text being written. While not proving by any means that the writing of the *Vie* was directly responsible for the upturn in the monasteries' fortunes, it does, however, provide evidence of the foundations' belief that using the example of Æthelthryth as patron would have been of benefit to them.

A copy of the *Vie* itself exists in one version only, as part of a late-thirteenth-century collection of saints' lives that is known to have belonged to Campsey Ash Priory in Suffolk, and which was read out to the resident nuns at mealtimes.<sup>60</sup> Linguistic and stylistic analysis of the manuscript has highlighted narrative practices that were more akin to works written a century before, and consequently it is now accepted that the Campsey Ash *Vie* is a copy of a now-lost late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century *Life*, and it is this earlier date upon which the basis of the investigation into the identity of Marie has hinged.<sup>61</sup> This earlier date of the original *Vie*'s completion indicated that its author was probably Marie de France, accepted for well over two centuries as the author of two twelfth-century Old French Romance collections, the *Lais* and the *Fables*, as well as a translation of another saint's life, *L'Espurgatoire Saint Patriz*. Towards the end of each of these texts, and with almost identical phrasing, Marie identifies herself as their

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<sup>60</sup> The manuscript, London, British Library, MS Add. 70513, contains two inscriptions that locate it at Campsey Ash in the early fourteenth century, the earliest of which specifically declares that it is to be used for mealtime reading, see Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, pp. 6-7. All references to the text within this thesis are taken from the edition produced by June Hall McCash and Judith Barban which is the first and only one to include a full translation of the Campsey Ash manuscript, see *Vie*.

<sup>61</sup> The first transcription and analysis of the text of the Campsey Ash manuscript was undertaken by Östen Södergård, who also put forward the idea that it was based on an earlier version (see Östen Södergård, ed., *La Vie Sainte Audrée, Poème Anglo-Normand du XIIIe Siècle* (Uppsala, Sweden, 1955), pp. 33-37). It was not until the work done by McCash in 2002 and Delbert Russell in 2003 that Södergård's analysis was fully endorsed, however. (See June Hall McCash, 'La Vie Sainte Audrée: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?', *Speculum*, 77 (2002), p. 756 and Delbert Russell, 'The Campsey Collection of Old French Saints' Lives: A Re-examination of its Structure and Provenance', *Scriptorium*, 57 (2003), p. 69).

author, suggesting that she is recording her name for posterity and so that she can be remembered, very similar to the sentiment contained in the *Vie*.<sup>62</sup> There are also many further references to memory and the act of remembrance throughout the texts, especially within the two hagiographic works, which also point stylistically to a similarity of authorship.<sup>63</sup> Finally, as June Hall McCash says, 'finding two female authors of the same name writing at precisely the same time ... is a difficult task. Finding two such authors further displaying in their works similar styles, thematic concerns and literary patterns would seem a virtually impossible task',<sup>64</sup> and it is this compelling reasoning that effectively guarantees that Marie de France was the author of the twelfth-century *Vie*.

Including the *Vie* in the same corpus as the *Lais*, *Fables*, and *L'Espurgatoire* leads to the question of identifying Marie de France herself, and as recently as 2011 Logan Whalen has stated that 'there seems to be no convincing evidence to establish firmly her identity, and her life remains a mystery'.<sup>65</sup> The association of the *Vie* with a wider body of work by the same author, however, meant that there was a great deal more literary evidence upon which to base any hypothesis, and scholars who have looked at the work of Marie de France in detail have been able to build up a profile of who she was. It is likely that she was working outside of France – in the *Fables* she uses the words '*de France*' after her name, which would be moot if she was actually based there, and the name Marie was so common in twelfth-century France that it would render her indistinguishable from any other Marie, something that was clearly the opposite of what she was trying to achieve by naming herself in the first place.<sup>66</sup> Other evidence allows Marie's

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<sup>62</sup> See Emanuel J Mickel, *Marie de France* (New York, 1974), pp. 13-15.

<sup>63</sup> Logan Whalen has concentrated on these themes, highlighting many examples where Marie's use of mnemonics and descriptive imagery aid the remembrance and memorialisation of the events that are described in the hagiographies (for instance, see Logan E Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington D C, 2008), pp. 32, 143, and 161-163).

<sup>64</sup> McCash, 'La Vie Seinte Audrée', p. 776.

<sup>65</sup> Logan E Whalen, 'Introduction', in L. E. Whalen, ed., *A Companion to Marie de France* (2011), pp. viii-ix.

<sup>66</sup> Mickel, *Marie de France*, p. 16.

location to be further pinned down. Firstly, while the texts are written in Anglo-Norman, *L'Espurgatoire* was a translation of a twelfth-century Latin manuscript, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, which originated from England;<sup>67</sup> secondly, Marie's geographical knowledge of the south of England and South Wales in the *Fables* is somewhat better than would be expected of a non-resident;<sup>68</sup> and finally, the subjects of the Campsey Ash collection of Lives are, in the main, English saints,<sup>69</sup> all of which point to England as her place of residence. Also, Marie dedicates the *Lais* to a '*nobles reis*' (a noble king) who, based on his reputation as a generous patron and his knowledge of both French and Latin, in all likelihood was Henry II (who reigned between 1154 and 1189), and it is therefore probable that she had connections with the royal court.<sup>70</sup>

Given this evidence, several possibilities for the identity of Marie have been proposed, the earliest of which was in 1910 by John Fox, who suggested that she was actually Mary, abbess of Shaftesbury and half-sister to King Henry.<sup>71</sup> Later scholars who also concentrated on Marie's links to the royal court have proposed Marie de Meulan or Marie de Boulogne, although it has subsequently been shown that Marie de Meulan was alive a century earlier than the currently accepted date of Marie de France's writing.<sup>72</sup> The final, and perhaps most compelling suggestion for the identity of Marie de France is that of an abbess of Chatteris Abbey in Cambridgeshire. Dominica Legge in 1963 tentatively proposed that Marie de France might well be the last of four identifiable post-Conquest abbesses of Chatteris, listed in the abbey's records as Mary de St Clare,<sup>73</sup> although she did not elaborate on this hypothesis. None of these

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<sup>67</sup> The authorship of the *Tractatus* is ascribed to Henry of Saltrey, a Cistercian monk from Huntingdonshire (Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory*, pp. 138-142).

<sup>68</sup> Mickel, *Marie de France*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>69</sup> Russell, 'The Campsey Collection of Old French Saints' Lives', p. 52.

<sup>70</sup> Mickel, *Marie de France*, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> John C Fox, 'Marie de France', *English Historical Review*, 25 (1910), p. 304.

<sup>72</sup> See Glyn S Burgess and Keith Busby, *The Lais of Marie de France* (London, 1999), pp. 17-19 for a discussion of these two women as possible identities for Marie de France.

<sup>73</sup> See Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford, 1963), p. 264.

candidates completely fulfils all the criteria that would put Marie de France's identity beyond doubt. However, it is certain that Mary de St Clare was at Chatteris at the time the *Vie* was written, while the monastery's location, only fifteen miles from Ely, adds weight to the likelihood that she was Marie de France. The *LE* also provides some historical detail that sways the argument further in favour of Chatteris Abbey and Mary de St Clare. At the time of the creation of the bishopric of Ely in 1109, Henry I also included in his decree the abbeys of Thorney and Chatteris, thus giving the new bishop of Ely control over these foundations.<sup>74</sup> From this it can be seen that the strong links between Ely and Chatteris were established less than a century prior to the *Vie* being written, and indeed they continued throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, making it more probable that the nuns of Chatteris would choose Æthelthryth as the subject of a Life.

Similarities between the two texts make it highly likely that the *LE* was the source of the *Vie*. For instance, descriptions of the founding by Æthelthryth of the abbey at Hexham<sup>75</sup> and the destruction of the abbey at Ely by the Vikings<sup>76</sup> are to be found in both texts, but are not mentioned in Bede's Life (and in fact, the latter event took place well over a century after Bede's death), while the miracle stories of Book II of the *LE* appear in the *Vie* in the same order.<sup>77</sup> However, the lengthy discussions regarding landholdings and disputes that were typical of the *LE* have been replaced by a much fuller description of Æthelthryth's life, and Marie placed emphasis on Æthelthryth's struggles against temptation during her first marriage to Tondberht, interpreting her ability to withstand her desires as a test of character, rewarded by the fact that her intact virginity allowed her to follow a chaste life after her husband's death.<sup>78</sup> Her virginity

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<sup>74</sup> *LE(B)*, Book III, ch. 6, pp. 249-250.

<sup>75</sup> See *ibid.*, Book I, ch. 8, pp. 21-22 and *Vie*, lines 883-904, pp. 66-69. In the texts Hexham is referred to by its early name, *Augustaldense* in Latin and *Augustaldeus* in Anglo-Norman.

<sup>76</sup> *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 40, pp. 54-55 and *Vie*, lines 2410-2428, pp. 140-141.

<sup>77</sup> For instance, see the miracle stories narrated in *LE(B)*, Book II, chs. 129-133, pp. 208-216, which are reflected in the *Vie*, lines 2953-3128, pp. 166-175.

<sup>78</sup> *Vie*, lines 341-350, pp. 42-43.

was seen as the way that she would have been allowed to take up a monastic life, and was a direct message to Marie's female audience that entrance to, and fulfilment once ensconced in, the cloister would have only be available to them if they were able to show that they were worthy of it. By highlighting the conflicting pressures of the loyalties demanded of Æthelthryth through marriage on the one hand and religious devotion on the other, Marie was able to provide her thirteenth-century audience with a set of experiences with which they were able to relate.<sup>79</sup> The portrayal of Æthelthryth within the text emphasises her multiple roles as chaste wife, widow, divorcee, and avowed nun,<sup>80</sup> imbuing her with all of the qualities that Felicity Riddy has collectively named 'the ideology of virginity'.<sup>81</sup> These were the traits most associated with women entering monastic foundations.

To understand the success of the *Vie* as a vehicle for attracting donations from wealthy benefactors, the history and experiences of the two foundations with the strongest links to the text are particularly informative. Both Chatteris and Campsey Ash were female foundations in the vicinity of Ely, although with very different histories. While Campsey Ash was founded after the Norman Conquest, in 1195, Chatteris was a pre-Conquest nunnery, probably set up between 1007 and 1016.<sup>82</sup> This makes Chatteris the latest of the pre-Conquest foundations,<sup>83</sup> and it is likely that its development took a considerable amount of time, meaning it was much later

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<sup>79</sup> Virginia Blanton, 'Chaste Marriage, Sexual Desire, and Christian Martyrdom in La Vie Sainte Audrée', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 19 (2010), p. 106. Blanton explores the dichotomy between the vows of marriage and those of religious chastity in much greater detail, focusing on some of the language that Marie uses in the *Vie* to portray the turmoil Æthelthryth was feeling.

<sup>80</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 178.

<sup>81</sup> Felicity Riddy, "'Women Talking About the Things of God': A Late Medieval Sub-Culture", in C. M. Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 112.

<sup>82</sup> For the date of the foundation of Campsey Ash, see Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350-1540* (Woodbridge, 1998), Table 1, p. 13, and for that of Chatteris, see Claire Breay, *The Cartulary of Chatteris Abbey* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> See Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*, Table 1, p. 167 which shows Chatteris to be the latest of the pre-Conquest royal foundations and the only one established in the eleventh century.

before it had evolved into a foundation comparable with those established after the Conquest.<sup>84</sup> Charter evidence suggests that Chatteris was founded either by Eadnoth, bishop of Dorchester, or by his sister Ælfwen who was a niece of King Edgar and who became the foundation's first abbess, but little else is known about the reasons behind its establishment. It seems to have struggled financially however, since it did not initially attract the same level of patronage as the other, crown-sponsored foundations.<sup>85</sup> Its records in the Domesday Book show it to be the poorest of the nunneries included in the survey, with a gross income figure of £20 10s 4d (Romsey's by comparison was £136 8s 0d, almost seven times as much).<sup>86</sup> Chatteris was isolated from the other eight pre-Conquest English nunneries not only financially but also geographically. Of these, six (one of which was Romsey, the others being Amesbury, Shaftesbury, Wherwell, Wilton, and Winchester) were all located near to each other at the border of the three counties of Dorset, Hampshire, and Wiltshire. By contrast, the nearest to Chatteris were Barking in Essex and Polesworth in Warwickshire.<sup>87</sup> When all of these circumstances are considered together, it is evident that the abbey at Chatteris in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries was neither able to compete with its contemporary institutions in terms of wealth, landholding, or royal heritage, nor was it able to benefit from having a network of similar foundations in the vicinity.

An analysis of the cartulary records of the abbey shows a markedly different picture from the latter part of the twelfth century onwards, however. Claire Breay's summary of the donations made to Chatteris suggests that it was attracting considerable gifts, mainly of land and property, throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and specifically between the final quarter of

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<sup>84</sup> In many cases, early nunneries were formed initially from hospitals or by anchoresses and their followers in remote locations, and slowly evolved into fully-fledged foundations, sometimes taking many years to achieve this, see Thompson, *Women Religious*, chs. 2 and 3, pp. 94-132.

<sup>85</sup> Breay, *The Cartulary of Chatteris Abbey*, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England. A History of its Development from the Times of St Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council 940-1216* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 702-703.

<sup>87</sup> Breay, *The Cartulary of Chatteris Abbey*, pp. 3-4.

the twelfth century and the third quarter of the thirteenth,<sup>88</sup> something that was not the case in the preceding period. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that a significant proportion of these donations were made by women. Of the forty donations listed, eleven were made by female benefactors, with all but one of them being made in the thirteenth century.<sup>89</sup> There are two other specific examples that are worthy of note: two entries dating from the first half of the thirteenth century detail gifts of two selions of land made by Robert de Noreis to the abbey, while in the same period Richard Muschet donated a messuage in Potter's Lane, Ely to Chatteris. What makes these gifts noteworthy is that they were each given 'with the assent of his wife',<sup>90</sup> suggesting that these were marriage dowers. There are direct parallels here with the *Vie*'s narratives regarding the dowers that formed part of the marriage contracts between Æthelthryth and her two husbands, Tondberht and Ecgrith. The *Vie* places great emphasis on the dowers, mentioning that of her first husband, Tondberht, no fewer than four times, and describing how the land with which she was endowed was a place of sanctuary where she could go to receive respite from the trials she was enduring in her struggle to remain a virgin.<sup>91</sup> The link between the donation of land or property and the ability to find spiritual relief could be interpreted as a message to potential donors that their benefaction could reap heavenly reward. Marie would have been well aware of the status of the women entering the nunneries (in fact the likelihood is that she belonged to that social class herself) and therefore would have realised the potential for dowers and donations of land and property that these women were able to bring with them into the foundation. A large but unspecified dower is also mentioned in respect of Æthelthryth's second marriage to Ecgrith, although the *Vie* deliberately points out that in this case she refused it, probably a reference to the duress she felt she was under to

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>90</sup> '... *consilio et assensu uxoris mee* ...', *ibid.*, charters 25, 41, and 92, pp. 161, 173 and 210. In post-Conquest England, widowed patronesses legally retained control of their marriage dowers after the death of their husband; Wogan-Browne, *Rerouting the Dower*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>91</sup> See *Vie*, lines 305-306, 742-746, 1295-1296, and 1600-1603, pp. 40-41, 60-61, 86-87, and 100-103.



marry him, and another example of the test of will-power to forego wealth and possessions in favour of frugality and chastity. Interestingly, Ecgrith's dower and Æthelthryth's refusal to accept it are not mentioned in the *LE*, and therefore their inclusion in the *Vie* clearly forms part of the message that Marie was trying to convey.<sup>92</sup>

The cartulary evidence shows that Chatteris's fortunes changed for the better in the period after the *Vie* was written, with the landholdings of the abbey having widened to incorporate land in Lincolnshire and Huntingdonshire, as well as in Cambridgeshire itself.<sup>93</sup> A general increase in gift-giving had been seen, and more specifically an increase in the activity from female benefactors. Breay also points to the number of offerings made to the foundation that were linked to the acceptance of nuns into the order, or that were from benefactors related to nuns that were already there,<sup>94</sup> and, while this cannot give an exact number of new nuns being accepted nor does it take into account the numbers leaving or dying, it does give an indication of a growing community rather than one that was decreasing in size and influence. There are clearly many factors that affect the fortunes of a foundation. However, the balance of evidence suggests that Marie de France was based at Chatteris Abbey at a time when its income levels were lower than other comparable institutions, landholdings were few and limited to a small area of Cambridgeshire, and it was without the benefit of royal patronage. The *Vie* was written with the aim of increasing the level of aristocratic benevolence, specifically targeting the widows and daughters of the nobility and the gentry by taking the example of Æthelthryth as a

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<sup>92</sup> See *ibid.*, lines 785-793, pp. 62-63 for the description of Ecgrith's dower offer. The comparative passage in the *LE* can be found in *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 8, p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> The cartulary lists lands, grants and rental income both in Chatteris and further afield, including a mill at Thriplow, south Cambridgeshire, and land with a portus (a harbour) in Cambridge itself, (Breay, *The Cartulary of Chatteris Abbey*, charters 166 and 167, pp. 277-278. Also, a mid-thirteenth-century privilege of Pope Innocent IV which lists the abbey's property holdings confirms that they had grown considerably since the Domesday survey of a century and a half earlier.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

royal, virginal, chaste benefactor who had (twice) resisted the temptations brought about by marriage and successfully given herself over to God.

In contrast to Chatteris, Campsey Ash was initially a very wealthy foundation, with the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* – a sixteenth-century audit of the religious houses of England – valuing it at £182 5s 5¼d.<sup>95</sup> What is important here are not the actual monetary values that have been quoted for the two houses, as they represent points in time four centuries apart and therefore cannot be compared to each other, but the priories' relative wealth when compared against other foundations at the same time – Chatteris being the poorest and Campsey Ash the richest. Campsey Ash was founded by two sisters of a Norman baron and landowner, Theobald de Valoines, who donated a significant amount of his land to them upon which to build the monastery,<sup>96</sup> and consequently the foundation was established with a considerable advantage in income from the outset, one that it was able to maintain until the Dissolution, and one that Chatteris had been unable to replicate.

Campsey Ash's initial and continuing wealth meant that it was not in the same situation as Chatteris in needing the donations of rich patrons in order to secure its survival, and the inscription in the Campsey manuscript stating that it was to be read out during mealtimes suggests that the audience was one of existing residents of the nunnery, as opposed to the potential donors being courted in the *Vie* at Chatteris. That said, however, the population of a nunnery was not by any means confined to just a contingent of nuns. In fact, the lay population of a female foundation was in some cases far greater in number than that of the religious, and its social composition was highly indicative of its wealth. Campsey Ash was one of only two in the Norwich diocese where records indicate that the clientele comprised principally of the

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<sup>95</sup> See Oliva, *The Convent and the Community*, Table 4, p. 19 for a comparative list of values of female houses in the Diocese of Norwich. Campsey Ash's value is nearly £50 more than the second most wealthy (Shouldham Priory, £138 18s 1d) and approximately three times that of the next three (Redlingfield Priory, £67 0s 1½d; Carrow Priory, £64 10s 6½d; Bungay Priory, £61 11s 9¼d).

<sup>96</sup> Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*, p. 123.

medieval nobility (the other being Bruisyard Abbey in Suffolk)<sup>97</sup> as well as including royalty, with the Calendar of Patent Rolls recording that Philippa of Lancaster, the granddaughter of King Edward III (reigned 1327-1377), stayed 'for a certain time' (long enough that carpenters were engaged to make repairs and alterations to the living accommodation) in the mid-fourteenth century, for example.<sup>98</sup> Long-term residents were not uncommon, and it was also not unusual for the lay boarders of the monastery to be accompanied by their children, who would benefit from the education that the nuns would have provided while they were there. The wealthier foundations would thus have built libraries of instructive and contemplative texts for use both by the lay and the religious communities.

A collection of texts that formed part of the Campsey Ash library (one of which is the manuscript containing the *Vie*) have been identified through their *ex libris* inscriptions.<sup>99</sup> Of the lay women who entered the nunnery, it was more likely that those who were the widows of royalty, the nobility, and the gentry would ultimately become their abbesses,<sup>100</sup> and Oliva has noted that these women were also responsible for adding to the foundation's literary collection.<sup>101</sup> Campsey Ash was, therefore, a very wealthy foundation established by two noblewomen as a result of the benefaction of a rich landowner, and which maintained long-running aristocratic and royal connections. It had a comprehensive library which was probably created and augmented by its elite lay boarders, some of whom would ultimately be appointed as its abbess and who would therefore be responsible for both the instruction of its nuns and the education of any resident children, while also being accountable for the nunnery's ongoing prosperity and expansion.

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<sup>97</sup> Oliva, *The Convent and the Community*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118. The record of Philippa's stay is contained in the *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1354-1358* (London, 1905-1916), p. 352.

<sup>99</sup> Oliva, *The Convent and the Community*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>100</sup> Wogan-Browne has identified a proliferation of these noblewomen who went on to be appointed as abbesses, see Wogan-Browne, "*Clerc u lai, muine u dame*", pp. 62-63.

<sup>101</sup> Oliva, *The Convent and the Community*, pp. 69-70.

The *Vie* was written by a woman, described the life of a woman, and was aimed primarily at an audience of women, whether they were the religious nobility of the foundation itself, or the aristocratic Anglo-Norman laity who would potentially be the abbey's future patronesses.<sup>102</sup> The small number of female foundations in East Anglia has limited the scope of the *Vie*'s geographical influence as demonstrated by the case studies above, and the example of Æthelthryth as this particular type of role model would have been far less powerful outside of the fenland area where she was less well-known. However, it is an example of how the character of Æthelthryth had been further utilised and developed to cater for a very specific audience: that of aristocratic patronesses who were able to donate land and wealth to the institutions located there, in the belief that the retelling of her story would help to establish the financial and economic basis upon which the abbey's survival and future success could be built.

### **The Wilton Life – Æthelthryth as Role Model and Nationalistic Symbol**

The *Vie*, written as a standalone *vita*, was an example of hagiographic writing that was beginning to decrease in popularity in the thirteenth century, with later *vitae* more often forming part of a compendium of saints' lives such as the South England Legendary and the *Sanctilogium Angliae*, both of which date to the early part of the fourteenth century.<sup>103</sup> An exception to this general trend is the fifteenth-century Life of Æthelthryth associated with Wilton Abbey in Wiltshire, which exists as the second of a pair of saints' lives in the manuscript London, British Library, Cotton Faustina B.iii. The Wilton Life of Æthelthryth (henceforth

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<sup>102</sup> Sally Thompson highlights the importance of lay founders and patrons in the initial establishment and subsequent financial security of post-Conquest nunneries, see Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 161-163.

<sup>103</sup> Æthelthryth's *vita* is included as one of over ninety saints' lives within the South England Legendary (see Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary* (Leeds, 1974), while John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae et Hiberniae* contains more than one hundred and fifty. The section pertaining to the English saints, of which Æthelthryth's Life is part, has been transcribed by Carl Horstmann in Carl Horstmann, ed., *Nova Legenda Anglie* (Oxford, 1901), vol. 1.

referred to as *Wilton (L)*<sup>104</sup> is anomalous from her other *vitae* not only temporally, but also geographically, and to a certain extent, stylistically. The questions of why a pair of saints' lives was written in the fifteenth century at Wilton Abbey, and why Æthelthryth of Ely was the subject of one of these lives, have been addressed here by considering the manuscript both from the perspective of the abbey itself and from that of the wider historical landscape of the time. The *Wilton (L)* appears to have been written either as a behavioural example to the nuns of Wilton Abbey, or as an idealised narrative to be viewed in the light of Henry V's national aspirations in the latter part of the Hundred Years' War. The evidence supporting both assertions is compelling, meaning it has not been possible to dismiss either one. Whatever the true reason for the *Wilton (L)*'s production in the first place, however, it is an example of how the portrayal of Æthelthryth had yet again evolved and was being used by the author to address a specific set of circumstances, nearly seven centuries after Bede had first chosen her as a role model for the Northumbrian church.

The *Wilton (L)* appears as the second of the two lives contained in the manuscript, the first being that of St Edith (whose Life subsequently came to be known as the Wilton Chronicle, referred to as *Wilton (C)* in this thesis), and can be confidently dated to around 1420, since the text includes a mention of Henry V, who reigned from 1413 until his death in 1422, but contains no reference to any later monarch.<sup>105</sup> Both lives are poetic works written in Middle English, and contain similarities in style and content, although the *Wilton (C)* is far longer, running to almost five thousand lines compared to only eleven hundred for the *Wilton (L)*.<sup>106</sup> Carl Horstmann, the

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<sup>104</sup> The *Wilton (L)* and the Wilton Chronicle (a *vita* of St Edith of Wilton written as a companion to that of Æthelthryth) have most recently been edited and translated by Mary Dockray-Miller, and this is the version referenced in this thesis, see Mary Dockray-Miller, ed., *Saints Edith and Æthelthryth: Princesses, Miracle Workers, and their Late Medieval Audience: The Wilton Chronicle and the Wilton Life of St Æthelthryth* (Turnhout, 2009).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> The two texts were first transcribed separately but in full, again by Horstmann, in the 1880s, see 'S. Edithe sive Chronicon Vilodunense; im Wiltshire Dialekt aus MS Cotton Faustina B.III', in C. Horstmann, ed., *Altenglische Legenden* (Heilbronn, Germany, 1881), for the *Wilton (C)*, and 'Vita S. Etheldredae Eliensis, aus MS Cotton Faustina B.III, fol. 260', in C. Horstmann, ed., *Altenglische Legenden* (Heilbronn,

texts' original editor, pointed to the similarities between them as evidence for them having the same author. This conclusion was reinforced by Michael Benskin in 1991 who used a linguistic analysis of the two texts to provide additional weight to his rebuttal of a critical review of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, a work of which he was one of the editors.<sup>107</sup> Both Lives begin with a history of the seven kingdoms of England, naming their kings and describing the lineage of the royal families that ruled them. Very conveniently, the manuscript's author included as marginalia the names of the works he had referenced while writing, of which William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, and Ranulf Higden's fourteenth-century *Polychronicon* were the principal ones.<sup>108</sup>

The choice of St Edith as a subject for a Life written at Wilton was an obvious one as she had been placed there at an early age by her father King Edgar, while her mother, Edgar's wife Wulfthryth, had been its abbess. After Edith's death in 984, her relics were enshrined in the abbey and subsequently became an important destination for pilgrimage.<sup>109</sup> Despite Edith living over three hundred years later than Æthelthryth, the *Wilton (C)* appears before the *Wilton (L)* in the Wilton manuscript, and this, together with its much greater length, is recognition of the importance of Edith in Wilton's history. The reasons for the choice of Æthelthryth as the companion saint to Edith in the manuscript become clearer when the similarities in their stories and their backgrounds are compared. Obviously, both were female saints, and they both also had royal heritage, with Edith the daughter of King Edgar whereas Æthelthryth's father was Ana, an Anglo-Saxon king of East Anglia. However, this still does not explain why Æthelthryth was

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Germany, 1881), for Æthelthryth's Life. It wasn't until 2009 that the version edited by Dockray-Miller was published.

<sup>107</sup> Benskin concludes that the texts were compiled by a copyist originally from the West Midlands, although suggests that he (or she) was based in Wiltshire at the time of their compilation, see Michael Benskin, 'In Reply to Dr Burton', *Leeds Studies in English*, 22 (1991), pp. 246-251. For the article by Burton to which Benskin was replying, see Thomas L Burton, 'On the Current State of Middle English Dialectology', *ibid.*, pp. 167-208.

<sup>108</sup> *Wilton (L)*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>109</sup> See Stephanie Hollis, ed., *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and 'Liber Confortatorius'* (Turnhout, 2004), for a translation of Goscelin's eleventh-century Life of Edith.

chosen as opposed to other royal Anglo-Saxon saints such as St Edburga of Winchester, whose father was King Edward the Elder (reigned 899-924) and who was geographically a much more local saint, or even St Mildrith of Thanet, daughter of a Mercian king. What is virtually certain is that the nuns of Wilton Abbey had access to volumes such as the *HE* or the *LE* that included the story of Æthelthryth's life – marginalia in the manuscript suggests that either, or possibly both, were used as sources for the *Wilton (L)*<sup>110</sup> – and Æthelthryth's popularity was extensive at this time, albeit primarily in her heartland of East Anglia.<sup>111</sup> It therefore may simply have been a case of the Wilton writer choosing the most well-known female saint for whom there was a readily-available source of information.

There are however similarities in the texts that suggest a deeper reasoning than this. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne refers to Edith as 'the English expert in vengeance miracles',<sup>112</sup> and there are several examples of her performing miracles that threatened or indeed actively punished anyone who attempted to violate her shrine, a character trait that she shared with Æthelthryth. The story of Edulf, a Glastonbury monk visiting Wilton who attempted to steal a portion of Edith's girdle by cutting it with a knife, is mirrored in the *Wilton (L)* by the fate of Ælfhelm at Ely, who was said to have chiselled a hole in the side of Æthelthryth's tomb so that he could reach inside with a hook to reach her clothing. Edulf found himself and the floor he was standing on covered in Edith's blood and his life was spared only because of the pleas for mercy by his brethren, while Ælfhelm was also only saved from death as a result of the protestations of his

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<sup>110</sup> Folio 261<sup>r</sup> contains the handwritten comment '*Cronica ecclesiastica / sancta Bede / I libro capitulo 17*', see *Wilton (L)*, p. 344, n. 21. Dockray-Miller suggests that Bede was the original source, with additional material coming from the *LE*.

<sup>111</sup> See Wiesje Nijenhuis, 'In a Class of Their Own, Anglo-Saxon Female Saints', *Mediaevistik*, 14 (2001), Table 1, p. 127, where Æthelthryth (referred to here as Etheldreda) is listed as having the highest number of entries in religious service-books and calendars.

<sup>112</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Outdoing the Daughters of Syon? Edith of Wilton and the Representation of Female Community in Fifteenth-Century England', in J. Wogan-Browne, R. Voaden, A. Diamond, A. Hutchison, C. M. Meale and L. Johnson, eds., *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain* (Turnhout, 2009), p. 201.

fellow clerics.<sup>113</sup> A comparison of the two miracle stories from the Wilton manuscript with each other and with the version that appears in the *LE* (upon which the *Wilton (L)* miracle is based) demonstrates that the Wilton author was attempting to emphasise the similarities between the experiences at Edith's and Æthelthryth's tombs, with the result that several historiographical details recorded in the *LE*'s version have either been altered or missed out entirely. The Wilton version of the Ely narrative is actually a conflation of two miracle stories from the *LE*, in which it was a Viking who made the original hole with an axe, and it was only a century later that the unfortunate priest was blinded as he tried to see into the hole and reach the saint's clothing.<sup>114</sup> Another similar detail is the appearance of St Dunstan in both of the Wilton miracles: he is reported as being present at the time of Edulf's transgression in the *Wilton (C)*, while he is credited in the *Wilton (L)*, along with King Edgar, for replacing the secular priests with Benedictine monks at Ely very soon after the violation of Æthelthryth's tomb. According to the *LE*, it was actually another Benedictine bishop, Æthelwold, who was responsible for the reforms at Ely and the other East Anglian monasteries, but there is no reference to him anywhere in the *Wilton (L)*.<sup>115</sup> The alterations of the details of the Ely miracle, differentiating it from the *LE* version and making it more comparable with the *Wilton (C)* story of Edulf, indicate a deliberate editorial change by the Wilton author to make the two miracle stories appear as alike as possible.

While many elements of the two Wilton stories are similar, the language used within them is however quite different, probably purposefully by the author. For instance, the descriptions of Edulf's repentance in the *Wilton (C)* and that of Ælfhelm in the *Wilton (L)* could easily have been replicated between the two accounts. They are, however, very different both to each other and

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<sup>113</sup> Edith's miracle is recorded in the *Wilton (C)*, lines 2605-2638, pp. 192-194, while Æthelthryth's is recounted in lines 990-1073 of the *Wilton (L)*, pp. 396-402.

<sup>114</sup> See *LE(B)*, Book I, chs. 41 and 49, pp. 56-57 and 60-61.

<sup>115</sup> See *ibid.*, Book II, ch. 3, p. 74-75 for the narrative relating to Æthelwold's reform of Ely and replacement of the secular priests with Benedictine monks.



to the *LE* narrative, demonstrating that the author had actively selected the words he used, rather than simply copying or paraphrasing the earlier texts' language.<sup>116</sup> There are passages of dialogue in the *Wilton (L)* where Æthelthryth is seen to have talked directly to her audience, usually comprising the nuns of Ely who were in her charge, which in the *LE* are written in indirect speech. For instance, the *LE* simply reports that Æthelthryth had been foreseeing her death for a long period of time prior to it finally happening,<sup>117</sup> whereas the *Wilton (L)* converts this one sentence into two separate speeches by Æthelthryth running to nearly sixty lines, which together represent over five per cent of the entire poem.<sup>118</sup> She tells the Ely nuns that she was going to be succeeded as abbess by her sister Seaxburh, and that her body would be translated sixteen years later. Æthelthryth was seen to be instructing her nuns on what was going to happen and what they should have done to prepare themselves for it. This was very much a didactic process both from the perspective of Æthelthryth to her nuns, and in turn to the audience at Wilton who were reading the *Wilton (L)*, or what is probably more likely, listening to it being read to them. This is not the only example of where speech replaces narration, although it is the lengthiest.<sup>119</sup>

There also appears to be a pattern whereby the author has substituted the character narrating or speaking from the *LE* with one who could be seen as being 'closer to God' in the corresponding section of the *Wilton (L)*. Where in the *Wilton (L)* the saint herself spoke directly to her audience, as in the foretelling of her own death or the merits of entering the convent, in the *LE* her actions or intentions were narrated, while what was spoken by her in the *LE* relating

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<sup>116</sup> In the *Wilton (C)*, Eadulf 'cried to God and St Edith for mercy, repenting very fervently for his deed' (lines 2623-2624, pp. 194-195), while the monk in the *Wilton (L)* 'kneeled down ... in front of the stone, and humbly made [his] prayers there, and humbly prayed to Æthelthryth for her grace' (*Wilton (L)*, lines 1067-1070, pp. 402-403). The *LE* simply records that the monk 'won the restoration of his health through the intercession of the bountiful virgin Æthelthryth' ('*meruit eorum eger recipere sanitatem per virginis alme Ædeldrede intercessionem*'), *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 49, p. 82.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. 19, p. 37.

<sup>118</sup> *Wilton (L)*, lines 381-408 and 419-448, pp. 360-364.

<sup>119</sup> Two further examples are where Æthelthryth extols the virtues of solitary living and serving God, *ibid.*, lines 208-212, pp. 350-351 and *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 9, pp. 24-25, and where she warns of the sins of material possessions, *Wilton (L)*, lines 485-494, pp. 366-369 and *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 20, p. 38.

to the tumour on her neck was recounted to her in a dream in the *Wilton (L)*, presumably by an angel. This alteration of speaker could be interpreted as adding spiritual weight to the messages being delivered by the Wilton author, presumably to have had a more powerful instructive effect on the text's audience. Virginia Blanton has suggested that the *Wilton (L)* could have been performed as a narrative play,<sup>120</sup> which is possible, although what is more probable is that it was read aloud to the Wilton Abbey residents, maybe at mealtimes just as the *Vie* was at Campsey Ash Priory over a century before.

While Wilton Abbey in the fifteenth century was probably one of the wealthiest, and therefore one of the most successful, female institutions in England,<sup>121</sup> there were also signs that the behaviour of its community of nuns was not compatible with the standards expected of an institution dedicated to the Rule of St Benedict. The VCH records that the abbey had endured a period at the end of the fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries where the nuns' behaviour had shown some 'slackness of discipline', and that they and the abbess had been admonished by the bishop of Salisbury during a visit to the abbey in 1379.<sup>122</sup> One of the specific criticisms they drew was that they had been breaching the rules on holding private property, and consequently the abbess was ordered to 'drink the same beer and eat the same bread as the nuns' and generally enforce the Rule of Benedict with more rigour.<sup>123</sup> The frugal life of the abbess and the supposed dangers of a predilection for material possessions are messages that are integral in all of the Æthelthryth hagiographies, and they play a particularly prominent role in the *Wilton (L)*. Her humble existence as abbess is the subject of another lengthy passage

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<sup>120</sup> Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 250.

<sup>121</sup> Figures relating specifically to the fifteenth century are not available, but the abbey is recorded as having up to eighty resident nuns in the years leading up to 1400, and its net income shortly before the Dissolution was more than £600 per annum. Only Barking and Shaftesbury received more than Wilton at this time (David Knowles and Richard N Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales* (London, 1953), p. 221).

<sup>122</sup> 'Houses of Benedictine Nuns: Abbey of Wilton', in R. B. Pugh and E. Crittall, eds., *A History of the County of Wiltshire* (London, 1956), vol. 3, p. 237.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

within the poem (running to more than forty lines), specifically mentioning that Æthelthryth had consumed mostly only bread and ale,<sup>124</sup> while the story that the tumour on her neck, which was ultimately to result in her death, had been caused as a result of her pride in wearing golden necklaces is one of the most well-known passages of her life.<sup>125</sup> The Wilton manuscript could have been commissioned either by the bishop as a way of ensuring that the abbey complied with his instructions, or as a response to him by the abbey, demonstrating their knowledge and, by extension, observance of the Rule. The performative style of the text, lending itself to being read out loud to the audience of nuns, suggests the former. The patron saint of Wilton, Edith, and the most popular female saint of the time, Æthelthryth, were being utilised to send a message to the Wilton community that they had to revert to a more monastic and spiritual lifestyle and adhere to the Rule of Benedict. Æthelthryth's life provided understandable and meaningful examples of how to behave and warned of the consequences should they have failed to do so, and its message was delivered to the nuns in a style that was unambiguous and that spoke to them directly.

The second, wider context in which to place the Wilton manuscript links it to the political and nationalistic aspirations of King Henry V, who occupied the English throne at the time the texts were written. War with France had been continuing intermittently for nearly eighty years by this point, although at the time of Henry's accession to the throne in 1413, an uneasy peace had existed between the two nations that his father, Henry IV (reigned 1399-1413), had chosen to perpetuate, primarily as a result of the rising costs of direct conflict. Henry V was a much better manager of the crown funds than his father had been, and he had thus been able to significantly improve its financial position in the first two or three years of his reign.<sup>126</sup> During this initial phase of rule, Henry had also been able to regain control of Wales which, up until this time, had

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<sup>124</sup> *Wilton (L)*, lines 306-347, pp. 356-358.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 485-494, pp. 366-368.

<sup>126</sup> See Anthony J Pollard, *Late Medieval England 1399-1509* (London, 2000), pp. 63-66 for an evaluation of the reign of Henry IV, and *ibid.*, pp. 69-71 for detail of the initial years of Henry V's reign.

been a continual thorn in the side of his predecessors, and this together with the increasingly healthy funding situation that he had brought about meant that he was able to turn his attentions to the accumulation of territory across the Channel. A series of political negotiations with Burgundy and the Armagnacs were not settled to Henry's liking, and he crossed over to France with his army in the summer of 1415.<sup>127</sup>

As part of his preparation for war with France, Henry was actively trying to gain the support of the English people and he did this using the twin tools of the English language and England's Christian history. In the first quarter of the fifteenth century, he deliberately promoted the use of English over French, both within his own court,<sup>128</sup> and internationally.<sup>129</sup> It was also increasingly brought into use within texts on subjects that were popular with the nobility and the ruling classes of the time, of which historical works, such as chronicles, romances, and hagiographies, were probably the most read.<sup>130</sup> His efforts proved to be successful, since not only were more texts being written in English, but also, despite French being the natural language for romance literature, English itself was changing by the beginning of the fifteenth century, with fewer French words being assimilated into the language.<sup>131</sup> Hagiographical works also instilled in their readers a sense of history, and consequently English saints were chosen as

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 74-76.

<sup>128</sup> John Fisher has charted the change from French to English as the language of the court, noting that prior to 1410, there is evidence of only two petitions written in English, while in the decade between 1411 and 1420, there are eight, and this rises to sixty-three in the next ten years, and one hundred and thirty two in the next, see John H Fisher, 'Chancery and the Emergence of Standard Written English in the Fifteenth Century', *Speculum*, 52 (1977), p. 888. Also, from August 12<sup>th</sup> 1417, the date Henry landed in France, he insisted that all of his letters to English subjects be written in English (Christopher T Allmand, *Henry V* (Yale, Connecticut, 1997), p. 421).

<sup>129</sup> Henry's emissary to the Council of Constance in 1417, John Polton, used the English language as a significant part of his defence against challenges to English nationhood, suggesting that 'language was the sign of a people'. Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 419.

<sup>130</sup> Katherine J Lewis, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives, History and National Identity in Late Medieval England', in H. Brocklehurst and R. Phillips, eds., *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain* (New York, 2004), p. 161.

<sup>131</sup> See Stanley Hussey, 'Nationalism and Language in England, c. 1300-1500', in C. Bjørn, A. Grant and K. J. Stringer, eds., *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past* (Copenhagen, 1994), pp. 101-103 for a description of how English was gradually being inculcated into all levels of fourteenth-century society at the expense of French.

role models to be exemplified and followed from the king's level downwards.<sup>132</sup> While there is no evidence to suggest that the *Wilton (C)* and *Wilton (L)* were commissioned specifically as part of Henry's nationalistic drive, they are hagiographies written in English in precisely in the period the king was trying to instil a sense of patriotic pride and fervour into his subjects. The choice of Anglo-Saxon saints who would have been seen to be protecting their communities against those that threatened their way of life was one that would have helped to engender a feeling of nationhood in the audience hearing the text. These kinds of hagiographies established links with the past to which people could relate, which made the saints who lived centuries earlier very pertinent to the late medieval audience reading and listening to their stories.

Aside from the compelling, although more general, incentives for the writing of hagiographies in English at this time, Wilton was also very keen to highlight its links with royalty. Two folios of the manuscript, which are sandwiched between the two Lives, contain a list of founders of the abbey which were clearly compiled as an attempt to connect the institution's establishment and development directly to the royal houses of England. According to the list, the abbey's first founder was King Alfred, who had apparently persuaded a certain Edward and his wife Æthelswyth to grant the land and the manor house of Wilton to its first nuns.<sup>133</sup> It then goes on to also list as founders many of the succeeding kings, including William the Conqueror, Richard II, and Henry IV, and ends with Henry V who is described as 'most noble king'.<sup>134</sup> Other than this recognition of Henry V being the incumbent monarch, there is no evidence of an attempt by the Wilton author to have highlighted any specific links with him per se. They would have had an opportunity to do this, as, according to some sources, Henry was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> September, which also happens to be the feast day of Wilton's patron saint, Edith.<sup>135</sup> This coincidence,

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<sup>132</sup> Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 417.

<sup>133</sup> *Wilton (L)*, p. 410.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 412.

<sup>135</sup> The date of Henry's birth is disputed but is limited to two dates and two years: either the 9<sup>th</sup> August or 16<sup>th</sup> September, and either 1386 or 1387. Mike Ashley favours September 1387 (Mike Ashley, *A Brief History of British Kings and Queens* (London, 2002), p. 201), while Christopher Allmand suggest the same

however is, not referred to at all in the manuscript, either in the history of the abbey contained in the *Wilton (C)* or in the founders' list located between the two texts. In naming an uninterrupted line of kings as royal benefactors while not specifically singling any one of them out, the abbey was again making evident its connections with the historic past, adding long and continuous royal sanction and authority to the messages it was conveying to its residents. Continuing the suggestion that the texts were written as a reminder to the Wilton community of their responsibilities in following the Rule of Benedict, each subsequent king acted as a reinforcement of these values which stretched right back to the abbey's foundation by King Alfred in the late ninth century.

The *Wilton (L)* provides evidence of Æthelthryth's influence outside of Ely and East Anglia. The scribes who chose her as the subject for a companion life to that of Edith, their patron saint, probably did so not only because of her popularity and the likelihood that copies of *HE* and the *LE* formed part of the Wilton library, but also because of her characteristics of humility and frugality. These were themes that needed to be reinforced to the Wilton community as they strayed from the rigours of the Rule of St Benedict at the end of the fourteenth century. Combined with these admirable traits, Æthelthryth and Edith were able to demonstrate the consequences that would have befallen those who failed to heed the messages, through the tales of the unfortunate priest and cleric who had wanted proof of the relics' sanctity and inviolability. The authors saw an opportunity to spell out and reinforce their precautionary narrative with reference to the abbey's royal patronage and historic connections, in English, at a time when nationalistic pride and a sense of English identity were on the increase and being actively encouraged by the king.

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date but a year earlier (Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 8). In his footnotes, he provides a comprehensive review of the various arguments for both dates and years (ibid., p. 7, n. 2).

## Conclusion

In the absence of a single monumental event such as Æthelwold's reform of the monastery or the Norman bishops' creation of the diocese of Ely, the effects of which would dictate the direction of the future development of Æthelthryth's cult, the three centuries following the completion of the *LE* were characterised by the widening of its recognition, made possible through a variety of venerative practices driven chiefly by institutions outside of East Anglia. The *LE* was the textualised epitome of Ely's status in the second half of the twelfth century. The bishopric's position was anchored upon a history that had been written to illustrate how the difficulties it had faced in the past had been overcome, while its wealth was demonstrated in the charters of the landholdings it had fought so hard to retain and regain. The story of Æthelthryth's life, example, and miraculous interventions contained in the *LE* presented her as Ely's founder, custodian, protector, and benefactor, and the illustrations of her benevolence and retribution served both to attract pilgrims to the shrine and to warn those who would threaten Ely of the consequences they would face. The focus and impact of the *LE* was, for the most part, concentrated on and around Ely, however, with little evidence of sustained interest in Æthelthryth's cult outside of East Anglia. This was to change from the beginning of the thirteenth century as the veneration of Æthelthryth and the knowledge of her story started to be disseminated through monastic institutions further afield. By the middle of the fifteenth century her feast days were being celebrated in locations from Lincoln to Exeter, her example was being used to help aid the introduction of the Christian church into Scandinavia, her curative powers were being invoked as far away as Durham, Glastonbury, and Salisbury, and the portrayal of her character was being used to encourage patronage, to set an example to wayward nuns, and to incite a feeling of nationalistic pride and patriotism.

While it appears that the geographical extent of the influence of Æthelthryth can be defined by the locations listed here, they are in fact representative of differing levels of interest in her cult.

The spread of ecclesiastical calendars and litanies that contained Æthelthryth's name is not an indication of the increasing popularity of her cult in these areas but shows only where her feast day was being celebrated and her name was being invoked in intercessory prayers. The distribution of the calendars and litanies containing entries relating to Æthelthryth across England in the tenth and eleventh centuries followed the pattern of monastic reform instigated by the Benedictine bishop Æthelwold, and this was a trend that also continued during the following three centuries. While on certain days of the year, her story would have been recited to the residents of the foundations within whose calendars her name appeared, they alone do not indicate that her cult was being actively promoted there.

Despite not necessarily proving that Æthelthryth's cult was being promoted throughout England by the fifteenth century, the calendrical and litany manuscripts have, however, provided the first evidence of sustained knowledge of her cult outside of England. The combination of those produced in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, and those produced in England but subsequently found in Scandinavia, has shown that Æthelthryth's story can be linked with the Christianisation of the church in the Nordic countries from the late twelfth century onwards. Amalgamating the locational information with the dates of these manuscripts has provided even more compelling evidence of this link, indicating a correlation between the progression of the conversion of Scandinavia to Christianity and the production of the calendars themselves. It appears that the behavioural example set by Æthelthryth had formed part of the pedagogical message that was disseminated by the missionaries into the newly established northern bishoprics.

At the same time as Æthelthryth's presence within liturgical manuscripts was rising and the power of Æthelthryth's story was being used as a tool to help achieve the aim of introducing Christianity to the Scandinavian church, the foundations in England were beginning to recognise the potential of the power of the relics housed in the shrine at Ely. The celebrations of her feast days, limited to one or two days per year, were being augmented by the active promotion of the



healing powers of her relics alongside those of the other relics in the foundations' collections. Extant relic lists indicate that claims of the possession of relics of Æthelthryth were being made as early as the twelfth century, as some of the major shrine centres took the opportunity of capitalising on the popularity of her shrine and the perceived power of her relics at Ely to attract pilgrims to their own foundations. Despite a number of the claims, especially those pertaining to primary relics of the saint, being evidently false, the ecclesiastical leaders of institutions such as Glastonbury, Salisbury, and York clearly felt that the investment they would make in promoting the cult of Æthelthryth would have been justified by the number of visitors they were able to attract. The influence of the cult of Æthelthryth was finally being felt outside of the borders of East Anglia, so that by the fifteenth century, her relics (or what were purported to be her relics) were being displayed in locations across the country.

There are more than a dozen extant manuscripts that contain elements of the narratives of Æthelthryth's *vita* dating from the three-hundred-year period between the *LE*'s completion and the end of the fifteenth century, suggesting that there were a significantly greater number produced during this time. The Lives that were written based on that of the *LE* demonstrate the extent to which the portrayals of Æthelthryth's character were being further manipulated by the texts' authors in order to fit in with the message they were trying to disseminate. Marie de France's *Vie* formed part of a collection of saints' lives that together could be viewed as a medieval women's handbook,<sup>136</sup> with Æthelthryth's example showing how to encourage patronage of female monastic institutions, while the author of the *Wilton (L)* was using her to either set an example to undisciplined nuns or foment a sense of nationalistic pride during Henry V's campaigns against the French. The malleability of Æthelthryth's character saw the

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<sup>136</sup> Wogan-Browne lists the attributes of all of the female saints included in the Campsey Ash manuscript, which ranged from founding monastic houses to negotiating court claims and giving eloquent sermons, see Wogan-Browne, *Powers of Record, Powers of Example*, p. 78.

portrayals of her evolve as the suitability of her as a role model was adapted to address a wide range of circumstances.

The monastic institutions of the high Middle Ages were reliant on pilgrimage as a means by which to increase the numbers of visitors and thus their income. While sermons and homilies were ideal mechanisms for delivering messages to the congregation already in the church, their collection of relics and the healing powers they possessed were the means by which pilgrims were attracted there in the first place. During the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, the cathedrals and abbeys of England were using Æthelthryth's relics, life, miracles, and example as part of their objective of directing venerative practice and retaining their positions of power. By the middle of the fifteenth century, however, their dominant position was showing signs of coming under threat as veneration of Æthelthryth became increasingly controlled within the local parishes and by the laity. It is during the century immediately prior to the Reformation, and through the material culture that adorned the late medieval parish churches, that this next, and ultimately final, evolution of the cult of Æthelthryth and its implications become clear.

## CHAPTER 5

### 1445 TO 1540 – PARISH CHURCHES AND PILGRIMAGES

By the mid-fifteenth century, Æthelthryth's shrine at Ely had been the focal point of a cult that had lasted, albeit in a number of different guises and with varying levels of influence and power, for over seven hundred and fifty years. Throughout this time there had been, however, one key constant: venerative activity relating to her cult had primarily been driven through monastic institutions. In the seventh century the first translation of her remains and the dynastic ambitions of her sister Seaxburh were centred on the monastery at Ely, while the Benedictine reforms of the tenth century were co-ordinated through Æthelwold's abbey at Winchester. Similarly, the textual traditions of Æthelthryth that included the *vitae* of Bede, Ælfric, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, Gregory of Ely, Marie de France, and the unknown author of the *Wilton (L)*, as well as the production of ecclesiastical calendars that contained her feast day, had their origins at the scriptoria housed in monastic centres such as Winchester, Canterbury, Durham, and, of course, Ely itself. The first signs of activity that had not emanated from the seats of the powerful English abbots and bishops were through the parish guilds that were ubiquitous in the fifteenth century, in which usually wealthy townsfolk pooled resources as a safeguard against less prosperous times, naming a particular saint as their patron.<sup>1</sup> A total of eight have been

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<sup>1</sup> While evidence of guilds has been found from as early as the eleventh century (see the description of the Cambridge Thanes' Guild in Chapter 2, pp. 107-110), they were at their most powerful and numerous in the later Middle Ages, see Fryde, 'Guilds in England before the Black Death', p. 215. They were associated with a variety of devotional activities, such as the provision of wax and lights in churches, lavish festivals and celebrations on their saints' feast days, as well as the performance of miracle plays and reading from hagiographies. These practices, and the significance and development of guilds more generally, are described in, for example, Hanawalt, 'Keepers of the Lights'; Hanawalt and McRee, 'The Guilds of Homo Prudens in Late Medieval England'; and from a more local perspective, Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside*.

identified where Æthelthryth has been named as the chosen patron saint, of which the majority were of fifteenth-century origin.<sup>2</sup>

However, it is the evidence provided from the images of Æthelthryth found within parish churches that most clearly demonstrates the shift in the focus of venerative activity away from the monastic and diocesan institutions, and more towards the local churches and the laity. Increasingly throughout the late fourteenth and especially the fifteenth centuries, and coincident with the large-scale rebuilding of parish churches in England, local priests and their congregations were making decisions regarding their choices of saints and venerative practices.<sup>3</sup> Responsibility for the upkeep and decoration of the nave of the church became the responsibility of the laity, and so the images of the saints from whom intervention was being sought came to adorn the churches' walls and furniture in what Eamon Duffy calls the congregation's 'principal expression of their mortuary piety'.<sup>4</sup> It is no coincidence that this period saw an increase in the veneration of what have been described as 'local' saints, whose sphere of influence was defined by a relatively small area. André Vauchez points not only to the relationships between the clergy and the laity in defining which saints were the subjects of veneration – with the clergy tending to favour well-known figures whose messages could be disseminated widely and collectively, while the laity would choose a local character who resonated more with their particular sets of circumstances – but also between the wealthy and the poor.<sup>5</sup>

While these distinctions are ones that are completely valid to make and more than adequately explain the relative 'localness' of some saints' cults, it does not suit all, and the cult of

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<sup>2</sup> All but one of these guilds were located in East Anglia, see Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 305-306.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Pounds talks of the impact of the increase in the number of churches on parishes and their administration, see Norman J G Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: The Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 3, pp. 67-112.

<sup>4</sup> Eamonn Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (London, 2005), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> See André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 157-158.

Æthelthryth is a case in point. The one-hundred-year period starting in the middle of the fifteenth century and ending with the Dissolution of the Monasteries was the final phase in the development and evolution of her cult that had had its origins over seven centuries before. While Æthelthryth during this time cannot herself be categorised as a local saint according to Vauchez's parlance, the period's significance is defined through the local veneration of her and the material culture that is the evidence of these venerative practices. Activity surrounding her cult in the later Middle Ages was being supported and driven mainly through the parishes whose congregations thought her important and influential enough to include her image on the walls, in the windows, and on the furniture of their churches. These images portrayed Æthelthryth in a number of guises – princess, abbess, teacher, virgin, nun – which in turn were representations of the variety of different messages that were being conveyed to the parishioners sitting facing them.<sup>6</sup> Describing these images, deciphering the lessons they were designed to impart, and mapping their locations reveals detail of their significance to the people that encountered and interacted with them, while at the same time providing a greater understanding of the extent of Æthelthryth's sphere of influence towards the end of the lifetime of her cult.

Augmenting the visual evidence found within the parish churches is that provided by the dedications of the churches themselves. The dedication of a church to a particular saint was an indication of that saint's significance to the church's parishioners in much the same way as was the provision of their image inside. While proving the specific date at which the dedication was made is difficult – identifying the earliest references to the church's dedication in documents

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<sup>6</sup> The importance and impact of religious images has been discussed primarily by art historians, of which two authors' works stand out. Katherine Kamerick, (see Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (Basingstoke, 2002), particularly chapters 2, 3, and 4) and Richard Marks (Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Stroud, 2004), principally chapters 2, 7, and 8) both articulate the role of medieval religious images through an exploration of the devotional practices associated with them, and in particular the differing perspectives of the laity and the institutional Church.

such as charters or churchwardens' accounts which provide the latest date for that dedication is probably the most reliable indication – their existence is indicative of links to the saint that together with the other sources provide evidence of venerative activity. The significance of the churches whose dedications are to Æthelthryth stems more from their locations rather than any single occurrence that may have taken place there, with the majority probably originating with the transfer to Ely of the land upon which they were sited, transactions that quite often had origins dating back to the tenth-century Benedictine Reforms. However uncertain the original date of dedication, the documentary evidence proves that all the churches discussed below had named St Æthelthryth as their patron by the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Pilgrimage in England was at its most popular at this time, with the major English shrine centres recording large numbers of visitors and increasing revenues from offerings at the shrines.<sup>7</sup>

What has up to this point been less clear, however, is the impact this growth in travel had had upon the local parish churches. The wealth of data collated here pertaining to Æthelthryth has allowed her cult to be considered from a much wider and more holistic standpoint than has been possible previously. By combining the data on the parish churches with locational information relating to the other sources of evidence of the cult of Æthelthryth that have been discussed in previous chapters, it has been possible to identify patterns that provide evidence of the journeys late medieval pilgrims and other travellers were making between sites with significance to Æthelthryth. The locations of church material culture and dedications, the sites of primary and secondary relics, and calendrical and liturgical information, all overlaid with known medieval routeways, has revealed routes that either converged on the shrine at Ely itself, or on cult centres of other saints in the vicinity with links to Æthelthryth. Æthelthryth's influence has previously been shown to be local (to East Anglia), regional (as knowledge of her

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, the sacrist's rolls from Ely, Norwich, and Canterbury, which documented oblations at the various shrines and altars of the cathedrals, all show the greatest annual returns in the years between 1400 and 1450, see Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England*, pp. 214-221.

spread throughout the south of England), and international (both in Francia and Scandinavia). The evidence of Æthelthryth's influence discussed within this chapter reinforces all of these monikers while at the same time demonstrating the inadequacy of their definitions. It shows that there were in fact clusters of activity relating to her shrine that point to her being more of a 'localised' (as opposed to local) figure, with spheres of influence that radiated out from certain key locations.

Mapping the evidence has revealed four distinct routes, three of which are centred on Ely and a fourth that reveals the extent of cultic activity pertaining to the saint in the southwest of England. In some cases, principally in East Anglia and the southwest of England, the evidence suggests that local churches with artefacts related to Æthelthryth had become interim pilgrimage destinations in their own right, attracting travellers to view images or hear stories of their chosen saint prior to reaching their ultimate destination, that of the shrine centre itself. Far from fading into obscurity in the fifteenth century, the orchestration of her cult and thus the centre of her influence was being diluted away from the cathedrals and their bishops to the parish churches and their lay congregations, while the identification of the series of pilgrimage routes demonstrates the popularity of her cult right up until the destruction of her shrine in the 1530s.

### **Images of Æthelthryth in Parish Churches**

The adornment of parish churches in England with decorated images and statues of religious figures such as the apostles and national and local saints was a phenomenon that reached its peak in the late Middle Ages, and it was only halted by the iconoclasm carried out during the reigns of Henry VIII (reigned 1509-1547), Edward VI (1547-1553), and Elizabeth I (1559-1603). The increase in the amount of decoration prior to the Reformation coincides with the period that has come to be known as the 'great rebuilding' of English parish churches which

commenced in the decades after the Black Death but which peaked in the fifteenth century.<sup>8</sup> During this time, naves and chancels were widened and enlarged, side aisles were incorporated into church plans, and chapels were added, all of which provided an ideal canvas for the inclusion of stained glass windows, wall paintings, and statues which would sit in specially-built niches incorporated into the walls.<sup>9</sup> Another embellishment to the church fabric that began to appear towards the latter part of the fourteenth century was the addition of screens between the nave and the chancel. Made out of either wood or stone, they supported a widened platform or loft upon which usually stood the Rood or crucifix.<sup>10</sup> Duffy describes these rood-screens as 'both a barrier and no barrier',<sup>11</sup> since they were not completely opaque but contained doors through which the clergy could pass from chancel to nave, and windows or squints, enabling the parishioners to view the proceedings at the altar despite being rarely allowed to set foot beyond the screens themselves. The presence of the screen between chancel and nave was a physical symbol that served to highlight the separate responsibilities the clergy and the laity had for the two main areas of the church. Everything to the west of the chancel arch, which included the rood-screen, was controlled, financed, and maintained by the parishioners, with the clergy responsible for the church's east end which comprised the altar and, where one was present, the choir. The parishioners' control of the nave meant that they were able to decide on the decorative features and images they wanted to incorporate within it. Consequently, along with the churches' windows and walls, the western side of the rood-screens (i.e. the side facing into the congregation) also came to be used as a medium upon which representations of saints' figures were painted and gilded.

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<sup>8</sup> Pounds, *A History of the English Parish*, p. 465.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Marks describes the ornate wooden tabernacles that were built into the niches to frame the alabaster statues, see Marks, *Image and Devotion*, pp. 240-243. A significant number of the tabernacles have survived the Reformation, but the statues themselves are more likely to have been destroyed.

<sup>10</sup> Pounds, *A History of the English Parish*, pp. 446-450.

<sup>11</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 112.



Responsibility for the lay end of the church inevitably included a financial element, and the level of rebuilding, maintenance, and decoration evident in the fifteenth century came at a very high cost. East Anglia, Æthelthryth's heartland, was a relatively wealthy region in the late Middle Ages, primarily as a result of the income generated through the growth in the trade of woollen cloth, an industry to which the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk had turned subsequent to the downturn in the profitability of exported raw wool in the fourteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The most obvious and effective way for this wealth to be channelled into the local churches was through donations and bequests, and evidence of these income streams exist in the form of churchwardens' accounts and parishioners' wills. The churchwardens' accounts were records of both income and expenditure, and therefore they not only show the amounts of individual donations, usually accompanied by the donor's request for how the offering was to be used, but also provide detail of where the money was actually spent. They indicate that the churchwarden was responsible, among many other things, for hiring the tradesmen required to carve, paint, and decorate the images found in the churches.<sup>13</sup> The accounts are, therefore, a good indicator at a point in time of how and how often the benefactors' wishes were actually fulfilled, although not very many complete sets have survived and accounts dated to before 1540 are very scarce, so any analysis over a longer period of time is difficult.<sup>14</sup> Medieval wills, on the other hand, are extant in much greater numbers, and many of them include bequests that specify repairs to or decoration of the church and its fixtures and fittings.<sup>15</sup> As with the

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<sup>12</sup> James Bolton discusses the cloth trade with respect to East Anglia in the fifteenth century (see James L Bolton, *The Medieval English Economy 1150-1500* (London, 1980), pp. 290-301) while the relative wealth of the East Anglian counties is demonstrated by R. S. Schofield in his nationwide analysis. Norfolk ranks third in 1334 and twelfth in 1515 out of 38 counties analysed for lay wealth, while Suffolk ranks eighteenth and seventh respectively, see Roger S Schofield, 'The Geographical Distribution of Wealth in England, 1334-1649', *Economic History Review*, 18 (1965), p. 504.

<sup>13</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Middle Ages*, p. 8. For a fuller account of churchwardens' duties in the late Middle Ages, see Katherine L French, *The People of the Parish* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2001), pp. 44-98.

<sup>14</sup> Marks, *Image and Devotion*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> The number of wills that name a parish church among their benefactors is such that Kamerick states that 'the scribe's prodding not to forget the building programme seems almost audible', Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Middle Ages*, p. 86.

churchwardens' accounts, a will is only a snapshot of the intentions of the testator at the time it was written. However, the volume of wills that survive allow a much greater picture to be drawn of the extent of church decoration and embellishment that was taking place in the later Middle Ages. These documents demonstrate very clearly that the wealth of the parishioners was the means by which the expansion and decoration of the parish churches was brought about, in line with Vauchez's assertion that a church's decision-makers were differentiated by their affluence, but what the wills do not provide is an indication of the motivation behind the people's generosity.

Images of Æthelthryth appear in enough numbers in parish churches to allow comparisons between artistic styles to be drawn, relationships with the representations of other saints to be suggested and interpreted, and judgements on the relative importance of her image to be made. In total, thirty-nine instances where Æthelthryth appears within parish churches (or is known to have appeared, but where the image is now lost) as a statue or carving, on rood-screens, wall paintings, or in stained glass have been identified. The majority of images, nineteen in total, appear on rood-screens, with fifteen found on stained glass windows, four examples have been identified on medieval wall paintings, with just one example of a carving. The identification of Æthelthryth on some of these images is far from certain, however, and, in the case of the wall paintings in particular only one of the four is recognisable and in fact the other three have either been completely destroyed or painted over, so no corroboration of the identity of the saint has been possible in these cases.<sup>16</sup>

The difficulty in conclusively identifying Æthelthryth on the majority of the wall paintings associated with her is symptomatic of wider concerns relating to images from parish churches

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<sup>16</sup> Virginia Blanton has listed most of the wall painting images, but is very careful to say that the majority are tentative identifications, and also does not state her original source for the association of these with Æthelthryth, saying only that they are known through medieval or antiquarian records, see Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, pp. 295 and 304.

that must be considered before any conclusions can be drawn, especially if they relate to the numbers and geographical spread of these images. Religious iconography in English parish churches was subject to several periods of iconoclasm where statues and stained glass windows were destroyed, paintings were defaced, and the churches' interior walls were whitewashed over or their images replaced with non-religious ones. From the 1520s onwards there are records of crosses and images of saints being removed from churches, with East Anglia being particularly affected for the first time in the mid-1530s.<sup>17</sup> As Duffy intimates, this activity not only halted pilgrimages to saints' relics and their images (which included those in parish churches), but also cut off the flow of donations which would have been used to create and maintain them.<sup>18</sup> It is through the churchwardens' accounts that the effects of the sixteenth-century iconoclasm can be seen, since they recorded the costs the churches incurred as a result of the visitations from the Crown's commissioners.<sup>19</sup>

The effects of half a century of iconoclasm towards the images contained within the English parish churches were widespread and near enough permanent. Marks notes drily that the destruction of images during the reigns of Henry, Edward, and Elizabeth was 'in general carried out efficiently',<sup>20</sup> although, while this statement is in essence true, the different types of images

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<sup>17</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 381. The increase in activity was the result of the issuance of a set of injunctions by Thomas Cromwell in 1536 aimed directly at the clergy that specifically addressed the 'superstition and hypocrisy' of the people, instructing the clerics not to 'set forth or extol any images, relics or miracles for any superstition or lucre, nor allure the people by any enticements to the pilgrimage of any saint'. These injunctions were followed two years later by a further set which said that the clergy were not to allow 'wandering to pilgrimages, offering of money, candles or tapers to images or relics, or kissing or licking the same', see Walter H Frere and William M Kennedy, eds., *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, (London, 1910), vol. II, pp. 5 and 37.

<sup>18</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 407.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, the warden of Tilney All Saints church in Norfolk recorded in 1547 that thirty-five shillings was paid out for 'whytyng of the Churche and stoppyng of the hooles' (the 'hooles' referred to here are the niches where the statues of the saints had stood), see Arthur D Stallard, ed., *The Transcript of the Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of Tilney All Saints, Norfolk, 1443-1589* (London, 1922), p. 172, while in the following year at Elmham, also in Norfolk, the 'whyghtyng of the Chyrche' cost twenty shillings, although the warden here was able to recoup some 9s 2d of this expenditure through the sale of the church images he had been told to remove, see Augustus G Legge, ed., *Ancient Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of North Elmham 1539-1577* (Norwich, 1891), p. 47 for the outlay for whitewashing the walls, and p. 43 for the income from the sale of the images.

<sup>20</sup> Marks, *Image and Devotion*, p. 258.

were affected to varying degrees. The alabaster statues that had become ubiquitous during the fifteenth century were the hardest hit, principally because they had been identified as idolatrous from the very beginning of the suppression, and also because it was very easy for them to be removed and destroyed. There are some examples of alabasters being recovered from hiding places in England, having been secreted away sometime in the sixteenth century to avoid destruction, although these are few and far between, and rather more instances have been recorded of statues being sold off and exported across to the Continent.<sup>21</sup> The one example that has been identified as an image of Æthelthryth is likely to have survived by being exported out of England during the Reformation, but unfortunately, as a result, its original location is not able to be ascertained.<sup>22</sup>

A large number of panes of stained glass were also victims of the destruction wrought in the sixteenth century, and again, since they were very easily smashed, the damage done was for the most part irreparable. Since images within windows only became the target of iconoclasm during the reign of Edward VI, a greater number did, however, survive. Also, further images were saved as some churches chose the option of covering them over rather than destroying them completely, principally on the grounds of cost. Under the Elizabethan injunctions in the 1550s, churchwardens were made responsible for any repairs that needed to be done as a result of the damage caused by the removal of images.<sup>23</sup> Glass was an expensive commodity,

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<sup>21</sup> Francis Cheetham cites several examples of alabasters that are identifiable as English in origin being unearthed in Europe after having been sold to foreign merchants instead of being destroyed. There are also accounts' records that detail sales of alabasters to European traders. Francis Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 52-53.

<sup>22</sup> The alabaster was acquired in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century by Walter Hildburgh, an American art collector. It was subsequently loaned by him along with a vast number of other artefacts from his collection to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The reasoning behind Hildburgh's identification of the figure as Æthelthryth can be found in Walter L Hildburgh, 'Some English Alabasters in Spain', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, 29 (1917), pp. 90-92. An image of the alabaster is included in Cheetham's catalogue of the V&A collection from 2005, see Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters*, p. 101.

<sup>23</sup> Marks, *Image and Devotion*, p. 267.

and therefore if the churchwardens could have found a way of avoiding having to replace panes, they would have taken it.

The damage done to wall paintings and rood-screens was slightly less permanent than that suffered by the statues and windows, although the numbers that survive and are recognisable today are still a tiny proportion of the total that would have been visible in the late fifteenth century. Walls that contained paintings were not removed, but, as has been seen from the churchwardens' accounts, tended to be whitewashed over, thus removing the images from view. The images painted on rood-screens fared slightly better, however. The structure of the rood-screen, rood-loft and the Rood itself was such that in some cases the crucifix and the top half of the screen that contained the loft were taken away during the Reformation, while the panels that made up the bottom half of the screen that contained the saints' images were left *in situ*. Instead of being destroyed, in a significant number of cases they were just defaced. Consequently, as Kamerick acknowledges, enough remnants of rood-screens and screen images exist today, especially in East Anglia, from which the variety and level of decoration can be studied and appreciated.<sup>24</sup>

East Anglia was the target for further Protestant iconoclasm during the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. William Dowsing, a Suffolk soldier, was appointed as the 'commissioner for the destruction of monuments of idolatry and superstition' in 1643 and was tasked with implementing a Parliamentary ordinance that authorised the removal or destruction of religious images.<sup>25</sup> Uniquely, Dowsing kept an extensive and detailed diary of the churches he visited and the images and objects that he destroyed, meaning that the full scale of his activities in East Anglia has been ascertained. Trevor Cooper has transcribed and analysed Dowsing's diary, and has concluded that during his two-year tenure as commissioner, Dowsing

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<sup>24</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Middle Ages*, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> Trevor Cooper, *The Journal of William Dowsing: Iconoclasm in East Anglia During the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2001), p. 12.

visited some one hundred and fifty churches in Suffolk and a further one hundred in Cambridgeshire.<sup>26</sup> Dowsing recorded that he ordered the destruction of ‘a few tens of stained glass pictures in each typical church’, and from the individual entries, Cooper has calculated that between forty and seventy per cent of churches in the two counties had been affected by Dowsing’s actions.<sup>27</sup>

The level of iconoclasm carried out in parish churches throughout England was extensive, and the numbers and types of images that were destroyed clearly must be taken into account when any analysis of those that remain is undertaken. Any conclusions drawn from the extant images can only be extrapolated with great care to the areas where no evidence exists, since the levels of destruction were not uniform, neither geographically nor typologically. Dowsing’s concentrated efforts in the two counties of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, and the differing levels of destruction and conservation of alabasters, rood-screens, wall paintings, and stained glass are both testament to the difficulties that need to be considered. That said, it does not mean that analysis is precluded, or that any conclusions drawn will be worthless. For instance, the destruction that took place did not discriminate between the different figures represented on the images – representations of the Virgin Mary were targets for iconoclasm no more or less than were local East Anglian saints. Consequently, comparisons of the styles and subjects of the images are valid and informative exercises that shed more light on the devotional practices prevalent in medieval parish churches.

Æthelthryth’s images are primarily found on rood-screens and in stained glass panels, with only one identifiable wall painting, and one carving. The vast majority of them (thirty, so three-quarters of the parish church images) are located in the East Anglian counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, with the remainder scattered around the southwest of England and the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 391-393 and p. 412.

Midlands. Concentrating on the churches located in East Anglia, it is immediately evident that the majority are located in Norfolk, with seven in Suffolk and only two in Cambridgeshire.

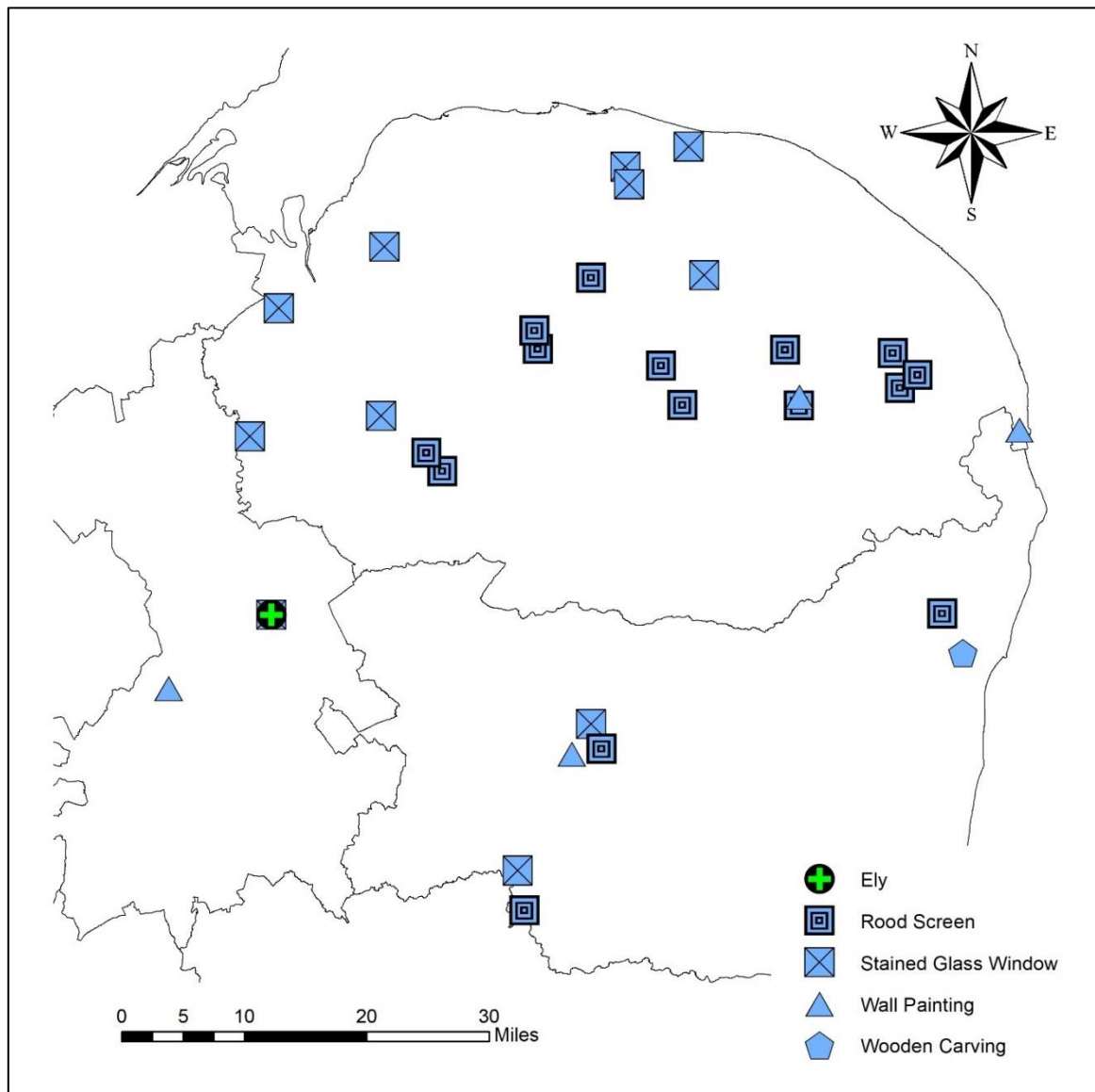


Figure 23. Locations of East Anglian Parish Churches Containing Images of St Æthelthryth.

The obvious assumption is that churches containing images in the latter two counties were the victims of the Dowsing iconoclasm in the seventeenth century. This hypothesis is strengthened by making a comparison with the numbers of images of St Edmund that exist in Suffolk. It would be expected that there would have been a large number of representations of Edmund in

parish churches of the county that contained his shrine and yet a quick survey reveals a total of only eleven.<sup>28</sup> The expectation is that, but for the actions of William Dowsing, there would have been far more, and since Dowsing was not particular in choosing the images destroyed, it seems likely that a number of those were not only of Edmund, but also of Æthelthryth.

Of the remaining images, there is a cluster of five churches located in an area either side of the border between Devon and Somerset. A possible common link is the foundation of Canonsleigh Abbey, a twelfth-century monastery dedicated to Æthelthryth, the site of which lies between Taunton in Somerset and Tiverton in Devon, and so geographically in the centre of the five churches.

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<sup>28</sup> John Salmon, *Saints in Suffolk Churches* (Bury St Edmunds, 1981), p. 19. There are undoubtedly more that could be identified with further work, but the number is sufficiently small as to seem incongruous to the level of popularity Edmund's shrine enjoyed, especially in Suffolk.



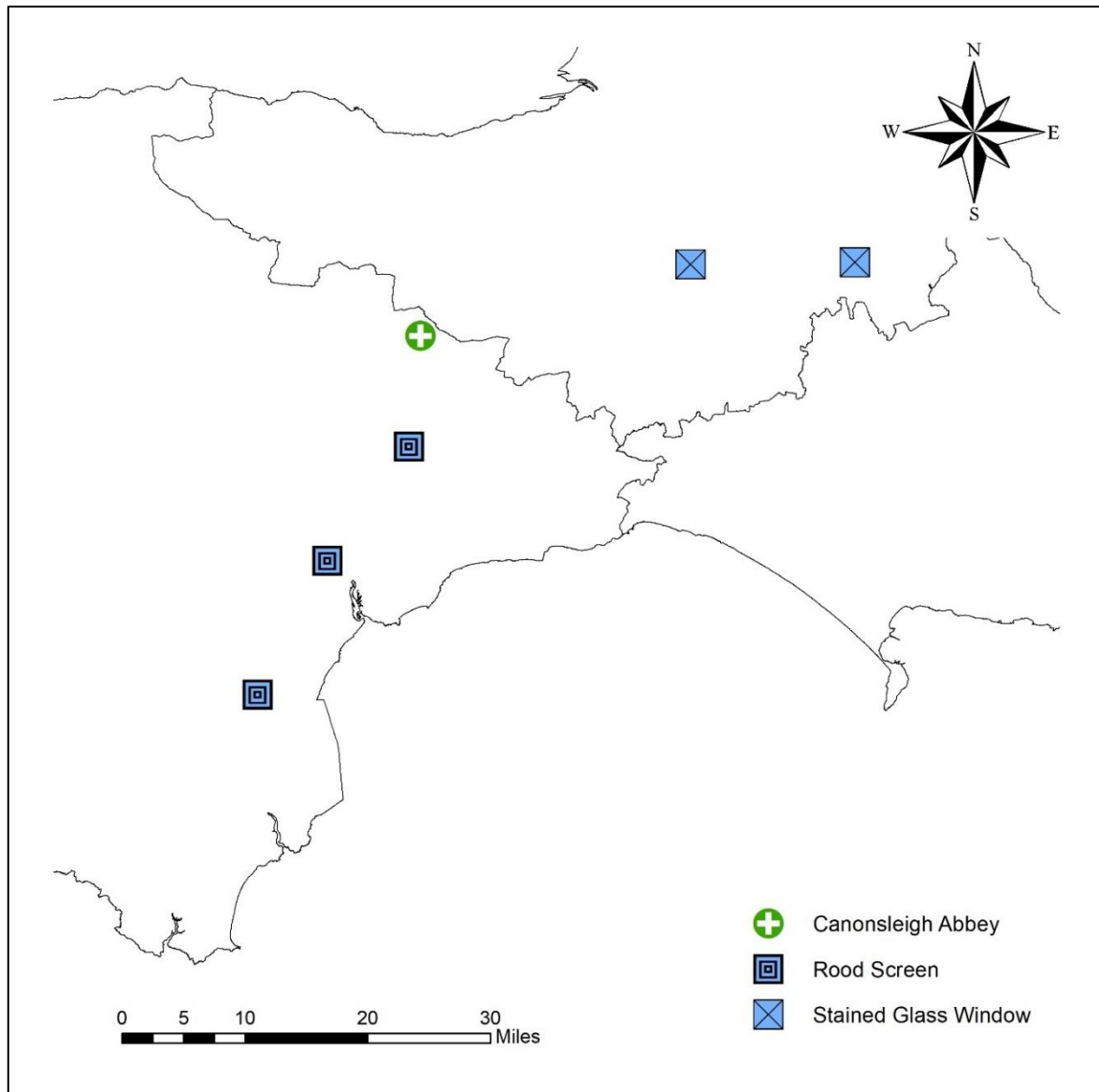


Figure 24. Locations of Parish Churches in Southwest England Containing Images of St Æthelthryth.

All but one of the images of Æthelthryth date from the fifteenth century, so coinciding with the period of great rebuilding and extending of England's parish churches. The exception to this is the solitary wall painting that has been identified with any degree of certainty as Æthelthryth. The painting can be found at Willingham church in Cambridgeshire and has been dated to the

thirteenth century.<sup>29</sup> It appears on one side of the splay of a lancet window, with which it is probably contemporary, and faces another painting, possibly of Æthelthryth's sister Seaxburh. The defining feature of the painting, and one which made the identification significantly more certain, is the bright red curved detail that is still visible on the saint's neck. At the time of the first translation of her relics in 693, a tumour was supposedly found to have miraculously healed leaving only a scar behind, representative of her fondness for a necklace that she had retained when all of her other belongings were given away, and this was taken as evidence of her sainthood.<sup>30</sup> The rest of Æthelthryth's face in the wall painting was painted using only pale colours, thus highlighting this detail, and this emphasis has been interpreted as sending a direct message to the members of the congregation of the dangers of material possessions.

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<sup>29</sup> The identification and date was made by the art historian Pamela Tudor-Craig, see 'Chesterton, Northstowe, and Papworth Hundreds: Willingham Church', in A. P. M. Wright and C. P. Lewis, eds., *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely* (London, 1989), vol. 9, p. 410.

<sup>30</sup> *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 27, pp. 45-46.

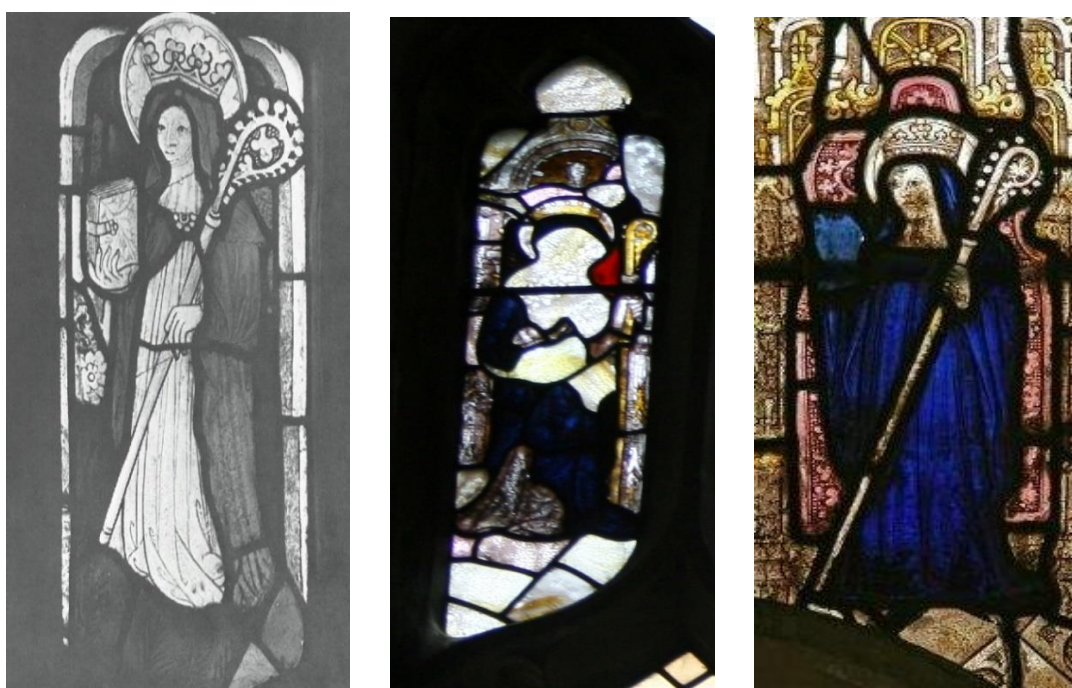


Figure 25. The Willingham Wall Painting of Æthelthryth. The scar is circled in red, top right.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Anne Marshall, 'St Etheldreda & another Saint: Willingham, Cambridgeshire', <http://www.paintedchurch.org/wilhamet.htm>, accessed 7 March 2017. Anne Marshall, the creator of the website from which this image is taken and an Anglo-Saxon scholar with the Open University, has identified this mark as the scar, saying 'what looks at first glance like a rather clumsily painted red mouth is in fact the livid scar'.

By the time of the great rebuilding, stained glass production and the manufacture and decoration of rood-screens were highly skilled and specialised crafts, undertaken by tradesmen who tended to be based in the major towns and cities.<sup>32</sup> Consequently from a stylistic perspective, and especially in the windows, the figures portrayed tended to be of a similar form. The figures of Æthelthryth were usually portrayed holding a staff or crozier in her left hand, a book or building (showing her as the founder of Ely Abbey) in her right and wearing a crown to signify her royal status.



Figures 26, 27, and 28. Three Fifteenth-Century Stained Glass Images of St Æthelthryth. They are, from left to right, Norton Church, Suffolk, Field Dalling Church, Norfolk, and Salle Church, Norfolk.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Richard Marks notes that medieval records list glaziers based in Norwich and Lincoln, Richard Marks, 'Stained Glass, c. 1200-1400', in J. Alexander and P. Binski, eds., *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England, 1200-1400* (London, 1987), p. 138, while Duffy suggests that rood-screens were being prefabricated in workshops prior to being installed in the churches where they were decorated, Eamonn Duffy, 'The Parish, Piety, and Patronage in Late Medieval East Anglia: The Evidence of Rood Screens', in K. L. French, G. C. Gibbs and B. A. Kümin, eds., *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1600* (Manchester, 1997), p. 148.

<sup>33</sup> Figure 26, Salmon, *Saints in Suffolk Churches*, p. 24. Figure 27, photographed by the author. Figure 28, Panton Cowen, 'The Medieval Stained Glass Photographic Archive', (2008), <http://www.therosewindow.com/pilot/Salle/sVII-table.htm>, accessed 13 March 2017.

The stylistic similarities of the three images can be seen above, with the crozier and the crown evident in all three, and the Norton and Field Dalling versions showing Æthelthryth holding a book. There are further Norfolk examples having similar features at Bale, Terrington St Clement, and possibly Outwell, although this latter identification is less certain as the pane containing the face was damaged, probably during the Reformation, and has been replaced.

Despite the best efforts of the Tudor iconoclasts, approximately five hundred rood-screens have survived in England, of which forty per cent are to be found in Norfolk and Suffolk.<sup>34</sup> The quality of the East Anglian screens is such that the area appears to have been developed as a centre for their manufacture and decoration in what was a relatively short period of time. The vast majority of the screens can be dated to between 1450 and 1530, with their manufacture being abruptly halted with the onset of the Reformation.<sup>35</sup> Like the stained glass panels, the images of Æthelthryth are generally similar, with the recognisable features of the crozier, book, and crown much in evidence.

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<sup>34</sup> See G E Fox, 'Notes on Painted Screens and Roofs in Norfolk', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 47 (1890), and William G Constable, 'Some East Anglian Rood Screen Paintings', *The Connoisseur*, 84 (1929), p. 141.

<sup>35</sup> Eamonn Duffy, 'Holy Maydens, Holy Wyfes: The Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century England', in W. J. Shiels and D. Wood, eds., *Women in the Church: Papers Read at the 1989 Summer Meeting and the 1990 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Oxford, 1990), p. 175.





Figures 29, 30, and 31. Rood-Screens from (l to r) Barnham Broom, Gateley, and Horsham St Faith, Norfolk. All images photographed by the author.



Figures 32, 33, and 34. Rood-Screens from (l to r) Ranworth and Upton, Norfolk, and Woolpit, Suffolk. All images photographed by the author.

The six screens shown above are the best examples of the fifteen located in East Anglia, and their quality is testament to the patronage of the parishioners of the churches in which they are located. Rood-screen panels (and, to a lesser extent, stained glass windows) were funded principally through donations and bequests, and consequently it has been possible to use the surviving wills firstly to accurately date the panels, and secondly to understand some of the motivations behind the bequests. Analysis undertaken by Simon Cotton has highlighted the varying amounts of money that were pledged specifically for maintenance or decoration of screen panels, and he has also shown that it was unusual for a panel to be paid for by a single donor. In actual fact, the churchwarden could wait for as long as ten years from the first donation before enough money was raised for a set of panels to be commissioned.<sup>36</sup> For instance, the wills relating to North Burlingham church in Norfolk (which also contains a rood-screen panel with an image of Æthelthryth) reveal six separate bequests dating from between 1525 and 1537 for amounts ranging from as little as 3s 4d by Edward Lacy 'to making new perke' up to forty shillings 'to gild perke' from John Benet, and five marks (66s 8d) by Robert Frenys, also for 'making the new perke'.<sup>37</sup> The panel itself bears a date of 1536, illustrating that it was not completed until eleven years after the first bequest had been received. An inscription that runs the length of the panel names some of the donors, and not surprisingly, Robert Frenys (spelt differently to his will), as the most generous donor, appears within it.

Depending on the level of bequest, donors were able to choose the specific saint they wanted to appear on the panels, suggesting a closer and more personal relationship with the figure whose image they venerated.<sup>38</sup> Bequeathing money to a named, local saint suggests a long-term investment on the part of the parishioner, and a pious connection between the individual, the church in which he worshipped, and the saint he was venerating and for whose intercession

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<sup>36</sup> Simon Cotton, 'Medieval Roodscreens in Norfolk - Their Construction and Painting Dates', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 40 (1989), p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.47. 'Perke' was the local Norfolk term for a rood-screen.

<sup>38</sup> Duffy, *Holy Maydens, Holy Wyfes*, pp. 176-177

he was asking. Æthelthryth, as portrayed on the panels, is for the most part conveying a message of humility, dressed in simple, unadorned robes (as can be seen particularly in the images from Barnham Broom, Gateley and Horsham St Faith). The image at Ranworth is an exception, showing her seated and dressed in an embroidered and patterned gold and blue robe, thus emphasising her royal status and her authority as abbess. The open book on her lap adds to the overall impression of Æthelthryth as a teacher and role model. The differing portrayals of the saint on the rood-screen panels reinforce the multi-faceted character of Æthelthryth, evident also through the hagiographic texts that have been written about her life.

Æthelthryth's image does not appear in isolation, however, and the identities of the figures who shared the rood-screen panels with her and the location of her image relative to them also served to reinforce the messages the parishioners received as they sat facing towards the chancel of the church. Taking the screen of Woolpit church in Suffolk as an example (shown in Figure 35, below), Æthelthryth's image is one of eight, of which four are local Anglo-Saxon saints (the other three being St Withburga, St Felix, and St Edmund) who appear with St Mary Magdalene, St Peter, St Paul, and the Virgin and Child. The hierarchy is clear, with St Peter and St Paul flanking the doors to the chancel and the two Marys outside of them. St Edmund and St Felix, both very important East Anglian saints, are next in order, with Æthelthryth and her sister Withburga comprising the two outermost images. The detail of the images demonstrates how the same theme was being reinforced across the different saints. All of the figures are portrayed wearing highly decorated robes, evidence of their royal or high ecclesiastical status. Also, while Felix and Withburga (the saints on the far left of the screen) are holding buildings – an indication of their position as founders of religious institutions – Æthelthryth, Edmund, Paul, Peter, and Mary Magdalene are all shown holding books in their hands, signifying their role as



educators and, as Duffy refers to them, exemplars to the lay congregation.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 35. The Rood-Screen at Woolpit Parish Church, Suffolk. Image photographed by the author.

Æthelthryth's position in the Woolpit screen, at the far right, is one that is either replicated or mirrored in several other Norfolk screens. For instance, at North Burlingham in Norfolk, Æthelthryth and Withburga appear in exactly the same positions as in Woolpit, with Withburga on the far left and Æthelthryth on the far right. They are the only two figures common across both sites.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 189.



Figures 36 and 37. The North (left) and South (right) Panels of the Rood-Screen at North Burlingham, Norfolk. Æthelthryth appears on the southernmost panel while Withburga is on the northernmost. The image of Æthelthryth is unfortunately heavily defaced but she is recognisable as a crowned abbess with crozier and book. Both images photographed by the author.

The figures are regally or ecclesiastically dressed, similar to those at Woolpit and emphasising their status, although the choice of saints (aside from that of the two sisters) is markedly different. Instead of the apostles Peter and Paul and the two Marys, the panels either side of the entrance to the chancel at North Burlingham contain Edward the Confessor and Thomas of Canterbury to the north, and John the Baptist and St Cecilia to the south. Here, the influence that the lay parishioners had over that of the clergy on the choice of figures to appear on the screens is very apparent. An inscription at the top of the screen lists John Benet, Thomas Benet, John and Cecilia Blake, and Katherine Frenys as benefactors, with each one appearing directly above the panels containing their saintly namesakes. This inscription, together with the will evidence for North Burlingham that has been mentioned earlier, demonstrates that the wealthy patrons of the church had specifically chosen saints with whom they had a very personal, and obvious, relationship. This points to a direct petition by the parishioners for intercession after

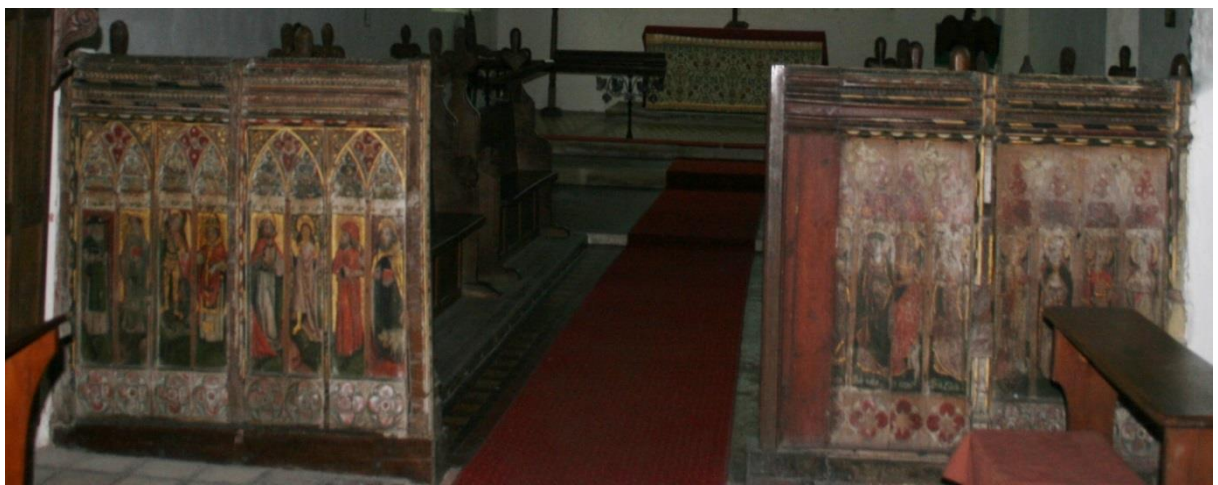
their deaths by the saints, which is in contrast to the more didactic, exemplary message to the living congregation that can be seen from the Woolpit screens.

At Gateley in Norfolk and Westhall in Suffolk, the focus of the subjects of the panels is again reflective of the congregation, but from a different perspective. Æthelthryth appears on panels in both locations, again as the outermost figure, so in keeping with her position as seen in Woolpit and North Burlingham at the extreme edges of the screens. However, the arrangement of the panels at both these churches is such that, at Gateley, all the female saints appear together on the northern side of the screen with a corresponding group of male saints to the south, while at Westhall the mirror image is true, eight male saints are portrayed to the north with another eight female saints to the south (see Figures 38 and 39, below). This pattern can also be seen in other churches' screens where Æthelthryth is not present, and, at a superficial level, this is a reflection of the seating arrangement for men and women in the church at the time where segregation of the sexes was commonplace.<sup>40</sup> The subjects of the screens, however, were not just replicating the gender of the parishioners seated opposite, but were representative of the specific messages being conveyed to the separate audiences facing them. Duffy talks of the female saints as symbolic not just of chastity and virginity, and thus as a recruiting mechanism for a monastic way of life, but also of devotion and of motherhood, characteristics of a medieval woman's married life.<sup>41</sup> The male saints, meanwhile, were representations of strength and nobility – Gateley's male saints include King Henry IV and St Louis, while Westhall's screen contains images of St Michael the archangel fighting a dragon, and St Clement, who was martyred by being chained to an anchor and drowned. The separation of the male and female saints on the rood-screens served only to heighten the differences between the messages being disseminated to the two separate sections of the congregation.

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<sup>40</sup> See Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 171. He also lists North Elmham and Litcham in Norfolk, and Belstead in Suffolk as examples where the same is true.

<sup>41</sup> Duffy, *Holy Maydens, Holy Wyfes*, pp. 187-190.



Figures 38 and 39. The Rood-Screens at Gateley, Norfolk (top) and Westhall, Suffolk (below).

The female saints appear on the left with the males on the right at Gateley, while at Westhall the males are on the left and females are on the right. Images photographed by the author.

The images that appeared on the rood-screens were not a collection of random saints chosen haphazardly by either the clergy or the laity, but were selected in a co-ordinated manner to reflect a specific purpose that was understood by and relatable to the medieval parishioners of the church. Each of the saints and the way they were portrayed acted to re-emphasise the messages being disseminated by the others, whether that theme was educational and instructive, intercessory and redemptive, or devotional and pious. Æthelthryth's role within

these collections of saints was one of reinforcement. She was well-enough known, especially throughout East Anglia, for people to be conscious of her life as virginal princess, abbess, and protector, and so the representations of her were able to be used in conjunction with the other local and national saints to reflect and emphasise these messages.

### **Parish Church Dedications to Æthelthryth**

Pre-Reformation church dedications to St Æthelthryth provide another piece to the jigsaw puzzle that together forms the picture of the influence of the saint during the time her shrine was the subject of veneration and a medieval pilgrimage destination. The sixteen pre-Reformation churches identified as being dedicated to St Æthelthryth are linked to the saint in a variety of ways, ranging from locations associated with King Ana of East Anglia, Æthelthryth's father, and dating back to the mid-seventh century, through to the site of palaces established in her name by the bishops of Ely in the fourteenth century. The majority of the dedications, however, tend to reflect the ownership of the land upon which their churches were located.

There are very few comprehensive sources of parish church dedications which cover the whole of England and Wales, with the most recent one (which itself is more than a century old) being Francis Bond's work.<sup>42</sup> He was more interested in the saints to whom the churches were dedicated than in their locations, and, while he provided various summaries ordered by saint, by number of dedications, and by county, details of the individual sites themselves are lacking. For his sources, he was very heavily reliant on a compilation from fifteen years earlier by Frances Arnold-Forster, who produced a three-volume work listing all the churches in England,<sup>43</sup> which were subsequently combined with a number of regional studies by Bond. Arnold-Forster's first

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<sup>42</sup> Francis Bond, *Dedications and Patron Saints of English Churches: Ecclesiastical Symbolism Saints and Their Emblems* (London, 1914).

<sup>43</sup> Frances Arnold-Forster, *Studies in Church Dedications, or England's Patron Saints* (London, 1899).

volume contains summary information (which Bond took as the basis for his work), with the second and third volumes containing lists ordered by parish and by dedication respectively. While they are very usefully laid out, there are some recognised omissions in Arnold-Forster's work. For instance, in the case of Æthelthryth (who tended to be known in church dedications by the later variation of her name, Etheldreda) she identified twelve churches bearing the saint's name,<sup>44</sup> as did Bond. Bond took Arnold-Forster's total but then ignored those dated later than 1700, of which there is one for Æthelthryth, and so must have identified another further dedication, although, since he did not list them individually, it is impossible to tell which one.<sup>45</sup> There are sources that list parish churches and their dedications dating from more than a century earlier than those of Bond and Arnold-Forster, these being two editions of the *Liber Regis* from 1754 and 1786 respectively.<sup>46</sup>

From this range of sources, a total of sixteen pre-Reformation churches dedicated to St Æthelthryth have been identified here, four more than quoted by Francis, and five more than listed in Arnold-Forster's volumes. There were no dedications to Æthelthryth listed in the *Liber Regis* that did not subsequently appear in the nineteenth-century volumes collated by Arnold-Forster. Of the five not recorded by her, three, namely Stow Green in Lincolnshire, Linton in Norfolk, and Ely Place in Holborn, London, are named in the *LE*, usually in relation to the transfer of landholdings to Ely, while the other two (Chesfield by Graveley in Hertfordshire and Reach chapel in Cambridgeshire) are mentioned in sources used to collate the respective VCH of the counties within which they are located. The churches are distributed across the country,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 14 (for a summary total) and pp. 360-361 (for a list of the individual dedications).

<sup>45</sup> Bond, *Dedications and Patron Saints of English Churches*, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> John Ecton, *Liber Regis, vel Thesaurus Rerum Ecclesiasticarum* (London, 1786). The *Liber Regis* was a printed version of a sixteenth-century manuscript known as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* which was originally commissioned by Henry VIII in 1534 to provide a record of parish incomes. The first printed version was produced in 1711 by John Ecton, with the antiquarian Browne Willis adding in the parish church-level information and an index, mainly from hearsay, after Ecton's death and re-publishing it in 1754. The 1786 version is a later edition published by John Bacon of the same work, although Bacon omitted to include any reference to the earlier authors.



but with the greatest number clustered around the site of Æthelthryth's shrine at Ely, as can be seen in Figure 40, below. Nine of the sixteen, or fifty-six per cent, are located either in Cambridgeshire itself or in the historic counties bordering it, which is to be expected for a major regionalised cult such as Æthelthryth's.<sup>47</sup>

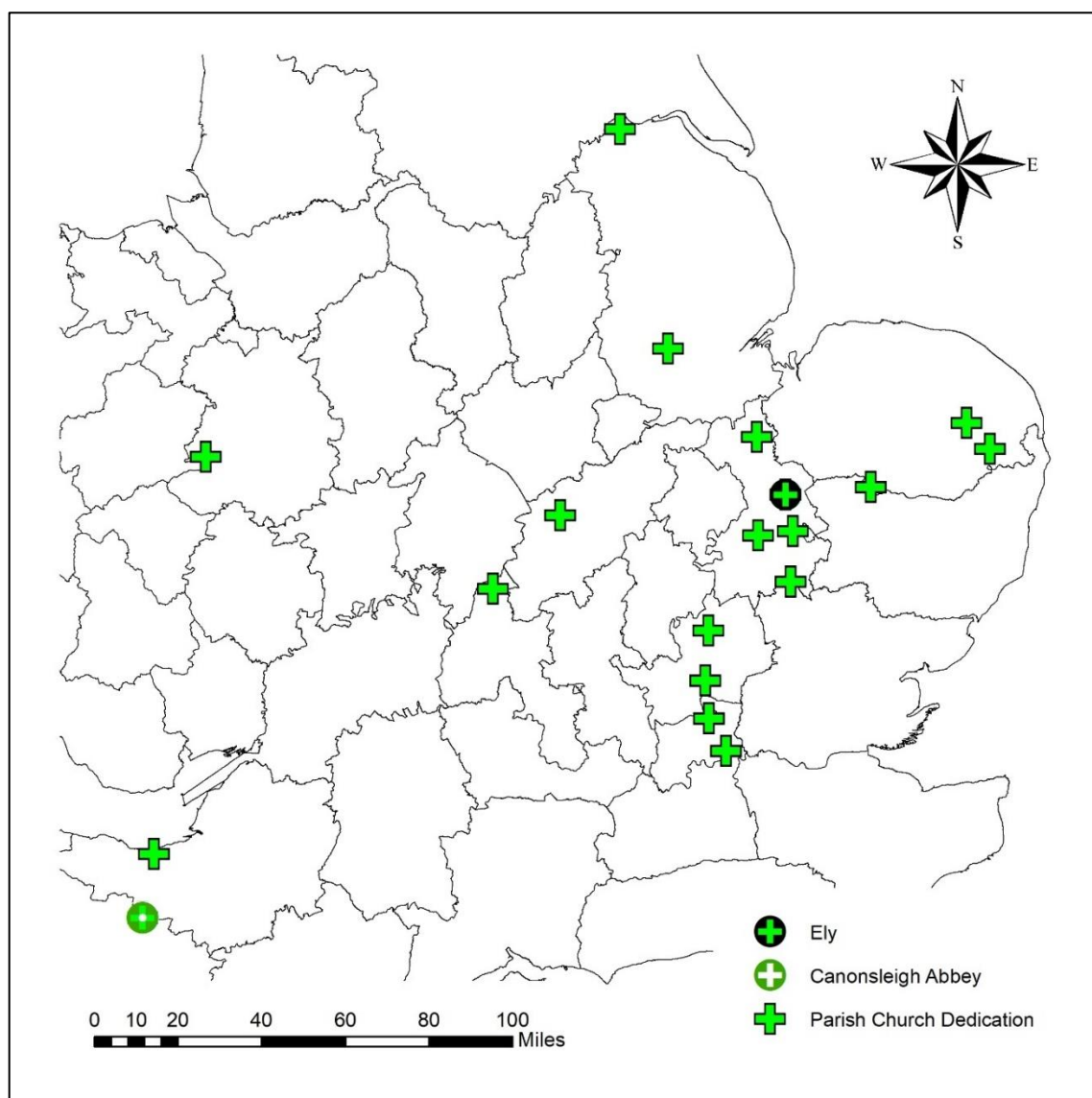


Figure 40. The Distribution of Pre-Reformation Parish Church Dedications to St Æthelthryth.

<sup>47</sup> As a comparison, Arnold-Forster lists sixty-four churches dedicated to St Edmund of Bury, and of these thirty-four (fifty-three per cent) can be found either in Suffolk or its neighbouring counties, see Arnold-Forster, *Studies in Church Dedications*, p. 359.

The reasons for the dedications are varied, however, and they reveal the differing ways in which the saint's influence manifested itself as the chronology of the dedications' origins has unfolded. The earliest are the dedications of West Halton and Stow Green in Lincolnshire, and Hyssington in Powys, which have been discussed in Chapter 1, and which are linked to journeys made by Æthelthryth and her father, King Ana.<sup>48</sup> Of the three Cambridgeshire dedications, two, those of Histon and Linton, have also been shown to be very early church foundations, and relate to land acquisitions linked to the tenth-century Benedictine Reforms. These dedications, and that of Histon's associated church at Impington, have been discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>49</sup> The same is probably true of the third Cambridgeshire location, that of Linton,<sup>50</sup> while Mundham in Norfolk also may well have been dedicated in similar circumstances, as the Domesday Book records that the abbey at Ely held land in this area before the Conquest.<sup>51</sup> Also donated to Ely by King Edgar, and which were dedicated to Æthelthryth by the fifteenth century, and probably much earlier, were three areas of lucrative and profitable land in Bishop's Hatfield and Totteridge in Hertfordshire, and Holborn in London, two of which were to become bishops' palaces used by the Ely ecclesiastical elite. The significance of these early land transfers in the context of the Benedictine Reforms of the tenth century have been discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>52</sup>

St Audrie's church in Somerset has the distinction of being the furthest from Ely. It is located in the village of West Quantoxhead, in the north of the county close to the border with Devon in the parish of St Audries and is at first glance the least explainable of all of the identified dedications. The *LE* makes no mention of landholdings in this area of the country, and historical records relating to either the parish or the village are scarce. The original parish church dates from c. 1100, and the first reference to the manor within the grounds of which the church is

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<sup>48</sup> See above, Chapter 1, pp. 37-45.

<sup>49</sup> See above, Chapter 2, pp. 97-98.

<sup>50</sup> See *LE(B)*, Book II, ch. 76, p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> University of Hull, 'Open Domesday', (2011), <https://opendomesday.org/place/TM3298/mundham/>, accessed 29 June 2017.

<sup>52</sup> See above, Chapter 2, pp. 93-94.



situated states that it was given by William the Conqueror to Sir William de Mohun, so the church is contemporary with this donation.<sup>53</sup> It has been suggested that by the late thirteenth century the church was dedicated to either St Ethelred or St Aldred, and that the later dedication to St Audrie was a corruption of these.<sup>54</sup> This, however, is unlikely, as neither King Æthelred I of Mercia or II of Wessex were referred to as saints, and the only Aldred of any note was a tenth-century scribe in Lindisfarne and Durham, with no links to the West Country, and again with no evidence of canonisation.<sup>55</sup> What is far more likely is that the church was originally dedicated to Etheldreda and was later anglicised to Audrie, and this is borne out by a local legend that Æthelthryth herself visited the area and founded a priory in the late seventh century.<sup>56</sup> This in itself is highly improbable, not least because there would have been some record of such a foundation in a chronicle or in the *LE*. However, early nineteenth-century maps of the area identify the field within which the present church stands as ‘Priory Piece’, and stone foundations were unearthed by a gravedigger in 1965 which could conceivably have been some kind of monastic structure, but no investigations or excavations have been carried out on the site to date and so any theory is pure conjecture.<sup>57</sup>

The name of St Audrie is not confined to the church, however. The adjacent manor house, local school, the parish itself, and the bay that is overlooked by the village of West Quantoxhead are all called St Audries, and this combined weight of evidence points to something more substantial than the dedication just being perhaps the result of the appearance of the saint in a liturgical calendar. What is slightly more compelling is the proximity of West Quantoxhead to the ruins of Canonsleigh Abbey, an Augustinian priory that was refounded as a nunnery

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<sup>53</sup> John Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* (Bath, 1741), p. 496.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 497.

<sup>55</sup> See Ashley, *A Brief History of British Kings and Queens*, pp. 25-26, for brief details of Æthelred I and pp. 35-38 for a history of Æthelred II (the Unready). See Michael Lapidge, et al., eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Chichester, 2014), p. 526 for a short biography of Aldred.

<sup>56</sup> Duncan Stafford, *The Book of St Audries and West Quantoxhead: An Amble Through History* (Wellington, Somerset, 2006), p. 65.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

dedicated to Æthelthryth. The abbey is located twenty miles south of the village and was the only monastic foundation dedicated to her outside East Anglia. As yet, no documentary evidence of a link between the parish of St Audries and the abbey at Canonsleigh has been found, but it is coincidental that these places, both with links to Æthelthryth, are so isolated from her East Anglian powerbase, and yet are located only one day's travel on foot from each other.

There are a number of other dedications to Æthelthryth for which an explanation as to their origin is not evident from the historical records. The parish church of St Etheldreda at Horley in Oxfordshire dates from the early twelfth century and contains a wall painting from the mid-fifteenth century that was thought to be of St Æthelthryth,<sup>58</sup> but which has subsequently been identified as St Zita. It is conceivable that the dedication could have stemmed from an early misidentification of the wall painting, but this would mean that the church would have had a different dedication before its addition and there is no record of any such dedication. In nearby Guilsborough however, thirty miles away across the county border in Northamptonshire, there is evidence of a change of dedication, with the church's literature stating that it was originally dedicated to St Wilfrid before altering to that of St Etheldreda in the fourteenth century. Wilfrid was known to Æthelthryth and it was he who proclaimed her a virgin prior to her entry into the monastery at Coldingham and also presided over her appointment as abbess at Ely.<sup>59</sup> However, there is no obvious reason why the dedication at Guilsborough was changed from Wilfrid to Etheldreda. Other pre-Reformation dedications to Æthelthryth can be found at Chesfield in Hertfordshire, where a church dedicated to the saint was founded in the early thirteenth century,<sup>60</sup> and Reach in Cambridgeshire, where a chapel dedicated to St Etheldreda was

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<sup>58</sup> 'Bloxham Hundred: Parishes, Horley and Hornton', in M. D. Lobel and A. Crossley, eds., *A History of the County of Oxford* (London, 1969), vol. 9, pp. 133-134.

<sup>59</sup> *LE(B)*, Book I, chs. 12 and 16, pp. 28 and 34.

<sup>60</sup> The VCH dates the first reference to 1232, see 'Parishes: Graveley', in W. Page, ed., *A History of the County of Hertford* (London, 1912), vol. 3, p. 90.

founded in 1378, and a bequest of one mark was made in 1515 for the upkeep of the building.<sup>61</sup> In Norfolk, a St Etheldreda's church was once active in Norwich, with the building being dated to the twelfth century,<sup>62</sup> and Thetford, which may have had origins from before the Norman Conquest.<sup>63</sup> Three of these four churches are now only ruins while St Etheldreda's in Norwich still stands, but is redundant as a parish church.

Aside from the geographic spread of the dedications, which itself helps define the extent of Æthelthryth's cult's influence towards the end of the Middle Ages, what is evident from this analysis are the main reasons for the dedications being made in the first place. The majority of dedications – especially those in the vicinity of Æthelthryth's shrine – relate to the donation to Ely (actually, specifically to Æthelthryth herself, as borne out by the charters of the tenth-century *Libellus*) of the land upon which the churches were located. These dedications were a symbol of the power of the saint as protector of Ely's monastic community and their interests, while the establishment of the palaces at Hatfield and Ely Place are indicators of how the post-Conquest bishops sought to build upon and demonstrate this power. The origins of the dedications of churches that are further afield from East Anglia tend to be more disparate, however. While the earliest dedications, in Lincolnshire and Powys, can be linked to the seventh-century activities of either Æthelthryth or her father, the origins of those of St Audries in Somerset, Horley in Oxfordshire, and Guilsborough in Northamptonshire have proven more difficult to understand. They are, however, indications that venerative activity relating to Æthelthryth was taking place at these locations and therefore are candidates for further investigation. This is especially true of St Audries, given its proximity to Canonsleigh Abbey, and

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<sup>61</sup> 'Cheveley, Flendish, Staine and Staploe Hundreds (North-Eastern Cambridgeshire): Reach, Chapels', in A. F. Wareham and A. P. M. Wright, eds., *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely* (London, 2002), vol. 10, p. 228.

<sup>62</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North-East Norfolk and Norwich* (London, 1962), p. 238.

<sup>63</sup> Francis Blomefield, 'Thetford, Chapter 15: Of the Parish Churches in the Town', in F. Blomefield, ed., *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* (London, 1805), vol. 2, p. 62.

the incorporation of the other evidence relating to Æthelthryth serves to confirm this.

### **The Identification of Pilgrimage Routes Associated with Æthelthryth**

The destruction of the images from parish churches perpetrated during the iconoclasms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries means that any conclusions drawn from an analysis of the geographical distribution of those that are still extant should be treated with caution. However, these limitations can be offset when the parish church information is amalgamated with that from other sources, as has been the case within this study. Mapping the locational data from the combination of the material culture and church dedications relating to Æthelthryth has revealed a series of geographical patterns. This data has been merged with information relating to the locations of relics, ecclesiastical calendars, and litanies, and then overlaid with known medieval routeways, and four distinct spheres of influence of the cult of Æthelthryth have been identified that are centred on either the shrine at Ely or other locations of significance to the saint. These spheres of influence have been interpreted as potential pilgrimage routes, the destination of which was either Ely or another major shrine centre with links to Æthelthryth. The parish churches containing images of Æthelthryth appear not only to have been interim stopping points on the journeys but would have acted as precursors to the arrival at the main shrine where pilgrims would have been able to build an increasing awareness and knowledge of the saint. Visitors would have had a picture of the likeness (or likenesses) of the saint in their minds. They would have either overtly or more subliminally received the messages that the religious community wished to impart through the use of the saint's images and would have established some kind of spiritual relationship with the saint before arriving at the principal shrine itself. Exposure to multiple images of a particular saint along with visits to churches dedicated to them on the journey to the shrine would have served to heighten the overall experience the pilgrims encountered once they had arrived there. The potential pilgrimage

routes identified through this analysis comprise a mix of local and longer distance journeys, and have also revealed potentially differing motivations for the journeys themselves, by both pilgrims whose destination was the shrine of Æthelthryth and the ecclesiastical elite who were travelling between their base at Ely and their bishops' palaces at Hatfield and London.

The site of Æthelthryth's relics at Ely was one of five major shrine centres in East Anglia, located in the vicinity of Bury St Edmunds to the southeast, Peterborough to the northwest, Walsingham to the north, and Norwich to the northeast. It is accepted that medieval pilgrims would have made journeys that incorporated multiple shrine sites, enabling them to visit the relics of several saints over the course of one pilgrimage,<sup>64</sup> and the close proximity of five cult centres to each other in East Anglia made this type of pilgrimage journey a viable proposition. The case for pilgrims visiting multiple destinations during one journey has long been made. The route to Santiago de Compostela has many such locations along its length at which pilgrims would have stopped during their travels to the shrine of St James, while the sixteenth-century essayist and traveller Michel de Montaigne describes how he visited several locations of sacred relics during his journey to Italy from France in 1580-1581.<sup>65</sup> Diana Webb has discussed the geography of medieval pilgrimage throughout both England and Europe, and uses the landmarks along the routes, which include parish churches, to calculate the average distances that pilgrims would have covered in a day.<sup>66</sup> What the distribution of parish churches shows, however, is that pilgrims would have had the opportunity to visit sites containing devotional images of the saints on the way to the shrines that were their ultimate destinations. This would then suggest that the choice of the subjects of the images portrayed in the churches was not simply just the result of parishioners identifying with a particular local saint in their own parish

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<sup>64</sup> Diana Webb discusses the idea of some pilgrimages having multiple destinations (dependent upon the reasons for the journey being made), see for instance her descriptions of the journeys undertaken by Simeon, an Armenian hermit, and Raniero of Pisa, a twelfth-century merchant, Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c. 700 - c. 1500* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 82-84.

<sup>65</sup> Martin Lowenthal, *The Autobiography of Michel de Montaigne* (London, 1935), pp. 290-310.

<sup>66</sup> See Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2000), especially pp. 124-128.

but could also have been influenced by the chosen saint of the pilgrims passing through on their way to the principal shrine site.

Combining the locations of churches dedicated to Æthelthryth with those that contained images of her makes it possible to pick out clusters of churches that may point to the existence of networks of routeways that led to either the shrine of Æthelthryth at Ely or other significant sites linked to the saint, and these are shown in Figure 41, below.

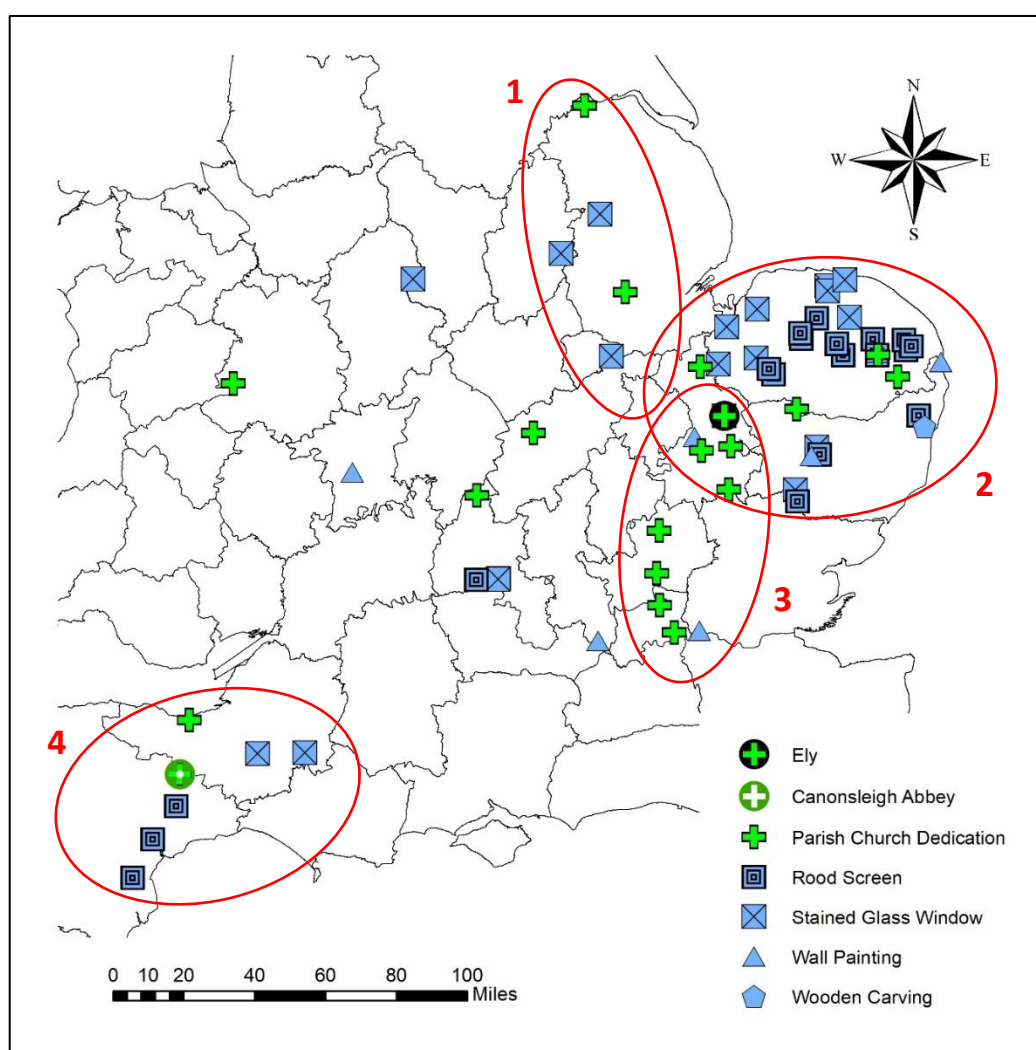


Figure 41. Clusters of Evidence of St Æthelthryth in Parish Churches. The clusters have been referenced within this thesis as follows: 1. Lincolnshire; 2. East Anglia; 3. South of Ely; 4. Somerset and Devon.

However, while these patterns are visible from the map, it is not possible without further evidence to identify the specific routes that would have been taken by medieval travellers. Overlaying known medieval roads provides the extra level of detail that transforms these clusters into potential pilgrimage routes. There has been surprisingly very little study into the network of medieval roads, and this has concentrated mainly on the easily identifiable Roman roads that still existed at the time and which formed the core of the long-distance road system during the Middle Ages. The first major work was completed by Frank Stenton in 1936 in which he notes the usefulness of both the fourteenth-century Gough Map and the itineraries of several medieval monarchs in identifying major routes.<sup>67</sup> The next significant study was Brian Hindle's 1976 article which builds on Stenton's initial observations to produce several maps of likely medieval roads for England, and, in addition to Stenton's original work, Wales.<sup>68</sup>

Cartographically, the publication of the first principal analysis in over thirty years of the Gough Map in 2008, combined with its release in digitised form a couple of years earlier, has widened our understanding of this unique resource while also making it accessible to a much wider range of scholarly application.<sup>69</sup> The map is the earliest surviving example showing the coastline, rivers, and towns and cities of Britain in the fourteenth century. What provides an indication of the map's use at the time it was drawn and what makes it unique as a modern cartographic resource, however, is the network of routeways it contains, shown as thin red lines, complete with numbers representing the distances between the locations they connect.<sup>70</sup> The digitised version of the map has been used here as an overlay to aid in the identification of the potential pilgrimage routes.

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<sup>67</sup> See Frank M Stenton, 'The Road System of Medieval England', *Economic History Review*, 7 (1936).

<sup>68</sup> Brian P Hindle, 'The Road Network of Medieval England and Wales', *Journal of Historic Geography*, 2 (1976).

<sup>69</sup> See Millea, *The Gough Map*. For the digitised version of the map, see 'Linguistic Geographies'.

<sup>70</sup> For a detailed explanation and analysis of the red lines, see Millea, *The Gough Map*, pp. 27-32.

The Gough Map cannot be used on its own, however, as it has been shown to omit several major routes identifiable from other sources. For instance, the key road from London through Canterbury to Dover, as described by Matthew Paris in his map of about 1250, is missing.<sup>71</sup> Despite the obvious omissions, the Gough Map can be used as the basis upon which evidence of the other routeways can be overlaid (much as in the example of the Matthew Paris map), and this is the approach taken with the application of the royal itineraries initially recognised by Stenton and described in greater detail by Hindle. Detailed itineraries were produced for King John, Edward I, and Edward II, with outlines also available for Henry I, Henry II, Richard I, and Henry III, although of these only Henry III spent most of his time in England. For those published for the former three kings, a total of over five thousand seven hundred separate entries is available, with the most (2,891) being recorded by Edward I. King John's was the first to include day-to-day details of the monarch's movements.<sup>72</sup> The combination of the kings' itineraries with the Gough Map and other cartographic sources allowed Hindle to produce a map showing approximately three thousand miles of medieval roads in England and Wales from the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>73</sup> An amalgamation of both the Gough Map and the royal itineraries combined with the wealth of data on locations with links to Æthelthryth has been used to generate detailed analyses of each of the clusters identified above.

The first cluster of churches dedicated to the saint contains those of West Halton and Stow Green in Lincolnshire and are associated with Æthelthryth's journey from the monastery at Coldingham to Ely in about 670. Both locations are described in the *LE* as the sites of miraculous events,<sup>74</sup> which alone makes them likely to have been destinations of pilgrimage during the later Middle Ages when the cult of Æthelthryth was highly popular. However, there is little

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<sup>71</sup> Hindle describes the full extent of Matthew Paris's routeway, which stretched broadly north-south across the country between Newcastle and Dover, see Hindle, 'The Road Network of Medieval England and Wales', pp. 209-210.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>74</sup> *LE(B)*, Book I, ch. 13, pp. 29-30.



historiographical narrative of the route she took between them, and no mention of the two-hundred-mile journey she would have had to have made from the abbey to the River Humber. The introduction of the network of medieval roads does provide more than one alternative route that Æthelthryth could have taken when travelling south to Ely, however, with five of the churches where images of the saint exist located on or very close to these thoroughfares. The route incorporates the important religious centres of Durham, York, and Lincoln, all of which have significant links with Æthelthryth. York's pre-fourteenth century relic list records that a relic of the saint was held there,<sup>75</sup> while a list from Durham states that Wilfrid was the recipient at the time of Æthelthryth's translation of the dress in which she was buried.<sup>76</sup> Lincoln was the seat of the bishopric of which Ely was a part prior to the creation of its own diocese in 1109. The potential route also includes the towns of Newark and Stamford, the churches of which contained stained glass images of Æthelthryth, as well as passing very close to the parish church at Willingham, the only location known to contain an identifiable wall painting of the saint. Furthermore, the distances between the sites that lie on the routeways are compatible with those that could be covered on foot in one day. For instance, a traveller walking between Lincoln and Newark would cover approximately nineteen miles, while the distance between Lincoln and Stow Green is just over twenty-four miles, both within the capabilities of medieval pilgrims, and in line with Diana Webb's calculation of a maximum of twenty to twenty-five miles per day.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See Thomas, 'The Cult of Saints' Relics in Medieval England', p. 44.

<sup>76</sup> Surtees Society, *Rotuli Feretrariorum*, p. 433.

<sup>77</sup> Diana Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (London, 1999), p. 16.

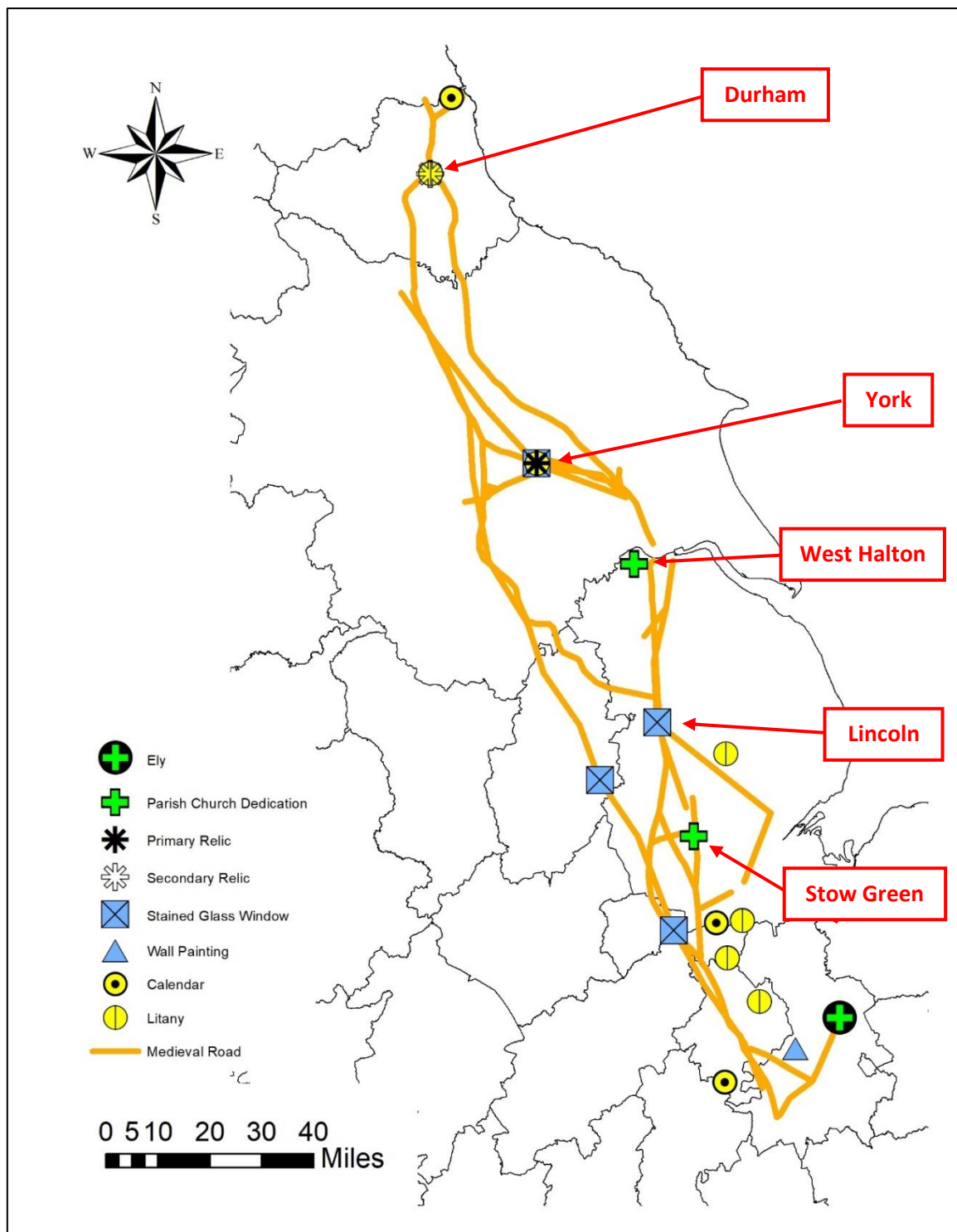


Figure 42. The Potential Lincolnshire Pilgrimage Route from Coldingham to Ely

Unpicking the plethora of sites in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk (denoted as the 'East Anglia' cluster in Figure 41, above) is more complicated than it first appears. As well as seven church dedications to Æthelthryth, it incorporates thirty-four of the images of the saint, representing nearly seventy per cent of the total number identified. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of known medieval roads through the region, with only those linking the population centres of Cambridge, Thetford, Norwich, King's Lynn, and Ely having been identified by Hindle.

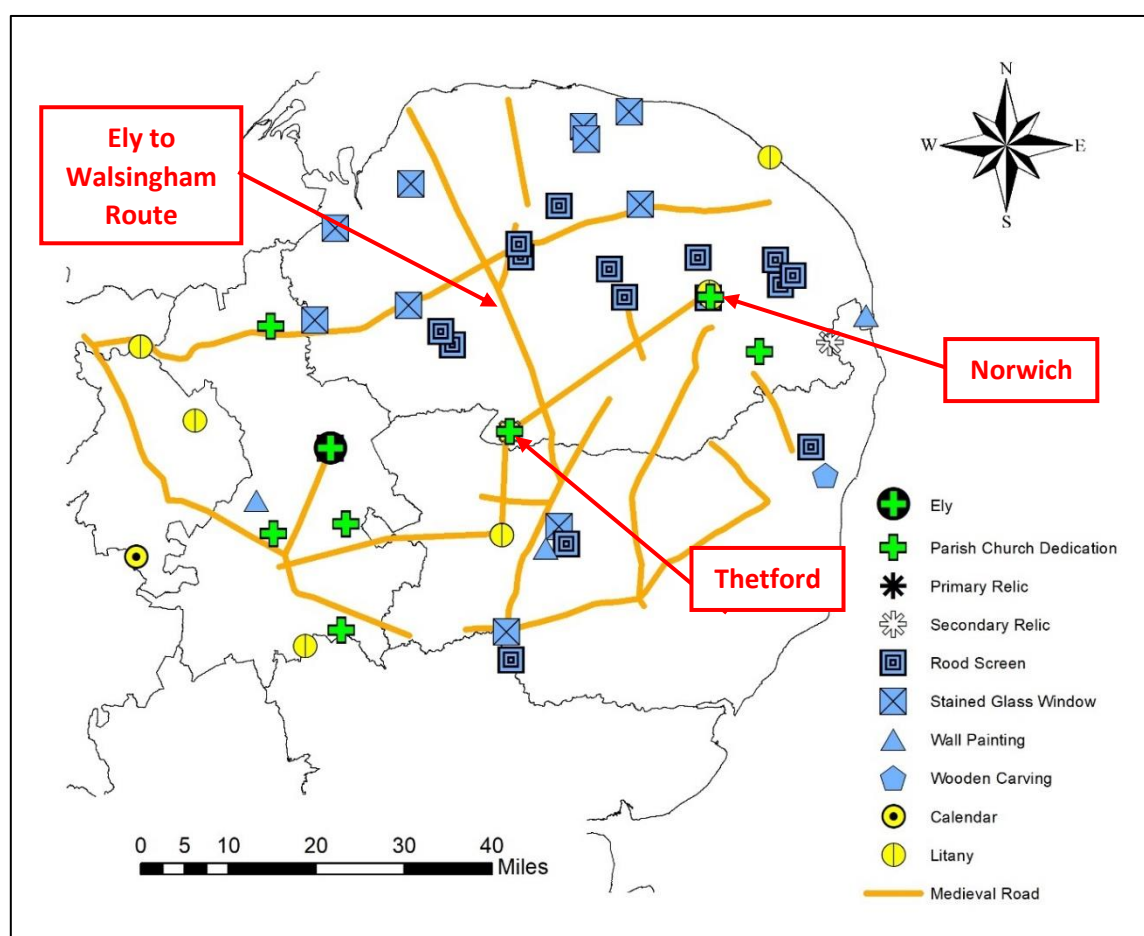


Figure 43. The Potential East Anglian Pilgrimage Routes

One medieval pilgrimage route that has already been identified is that from Ely to Walsingham. Martin Locker has used a combination of archaeological and documentary evidence overlaid with the royal itinerary of Edward I to plot the route pilgrims would have taken, linking three

medieval trackways, the Hereward Way, Palmer's Way, and the Pilgrim Walk. It broadly fits with the route-way annotated above, and also formed part of Hindle's original map.<sup>78</sup> The route leaves Ely on the city's eastern side and continues northeast. At the time pilgrims would have been travelling along this road, access to the Isle of Ely was severely limited since the surrounding fenland had not yet been drained, and entering and exiting the town was confined to three principal causeways, only one of which, known as the Stuntney Causeway, was on the eastern side of the town.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, travellers wishing to visit the shrine of Æthelthryth from anywhere to the east of Ely, including those from Walsingham, would have converged on to this road at the edge of the Fens, with the only other alternative being a much longer journey to the south through Cambridge.

The volume of East Anglian images of Æthelthryth that have been identified, especially in Norfolk, combined with the small amount of cartographic evidence of medieval roads to the east of Ely makes any supposition regarding potential pilgrim routes in the area outside the Fens much more difficult. It is probable that there were in fact very few major route-ways (the principal one being that shown on the map above between Cambridge, Thetford and Norwich), but rather a more substantial network of local routes that existed linking the villages and settlements in the area which would have been used by the local population and visitor alike. It is therefore likely that pilgrimage to Ely in this area consisted more of shorter, local trips from the pilgrims' home villages rather than longer and lengthier journeys. This hypothesis is strengthened when the distribution of wayside crosses in Norfolk is considered as well. These crosses were positioned at key locations such as crossroads and parish boundaries and acted as direction indicators to religious sites such as chapels, wells, or parish churches. Nicola Whyte has mapped the locations of known medieval wayside crosses in Norfolk, which she says

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<sup>78</sup> Locker's methodology and rationale for choosing this route is described in Martin Locker, *Landscapes of Pilgrimage in Medieval Britain* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 27-61.

<sup>79</sup> The various routes in and out of the city are discussed by Anne Holton-Krayenbuhl. See especially Anne Holton-Krayenbuhl, *The Topography of Medieval Ely* (Cambridge, 2011), Map 1.

significantly underestimates the number that existed in the Middle Ages, and their geographical pattern is not dissimilar to that of the images of Æthelthryth (although the number of crosses is much greater).<sup>80</sup> The ubiquity of the crosses and their wide distribution suggests that journeys were being made to religious centres across the county of Norfolk using a multitude of smaller trackways between the villages, and visitations to the East Anglian churches with links to Æthelthryth would have formed a subset of these.

The number of churches dedicated to Æthelthryth in the area to the south of Ely (shown as the 'South of Ely' cluster in Figure 41, above) is the same as that of East Anglia, with a total of seven churches stretching broadly north-south between Ely and London. Conversely, however, there are no churches in the defined area that contain images of the saint.

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<sup>80</sup> See Nicola Whyte, *Inhabiting the Landscape: Place, Custom and Memory, 1500-1800* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 32-39. The map showing the distribution can be found on p. 33. Also see Nicola Whyte, 'Norfolk Wayside Crosses: Biographies of Landscape and Place', in T. A. Heslop, E. Mellings and M. Thøfner, eds., *Art, Faith and Place in East Anglia: From Prehistory to the Present* (Woodbridge, 2012), for her analysis of the crosses as significant markers of territorial boundaries and indicators of religious patronage.

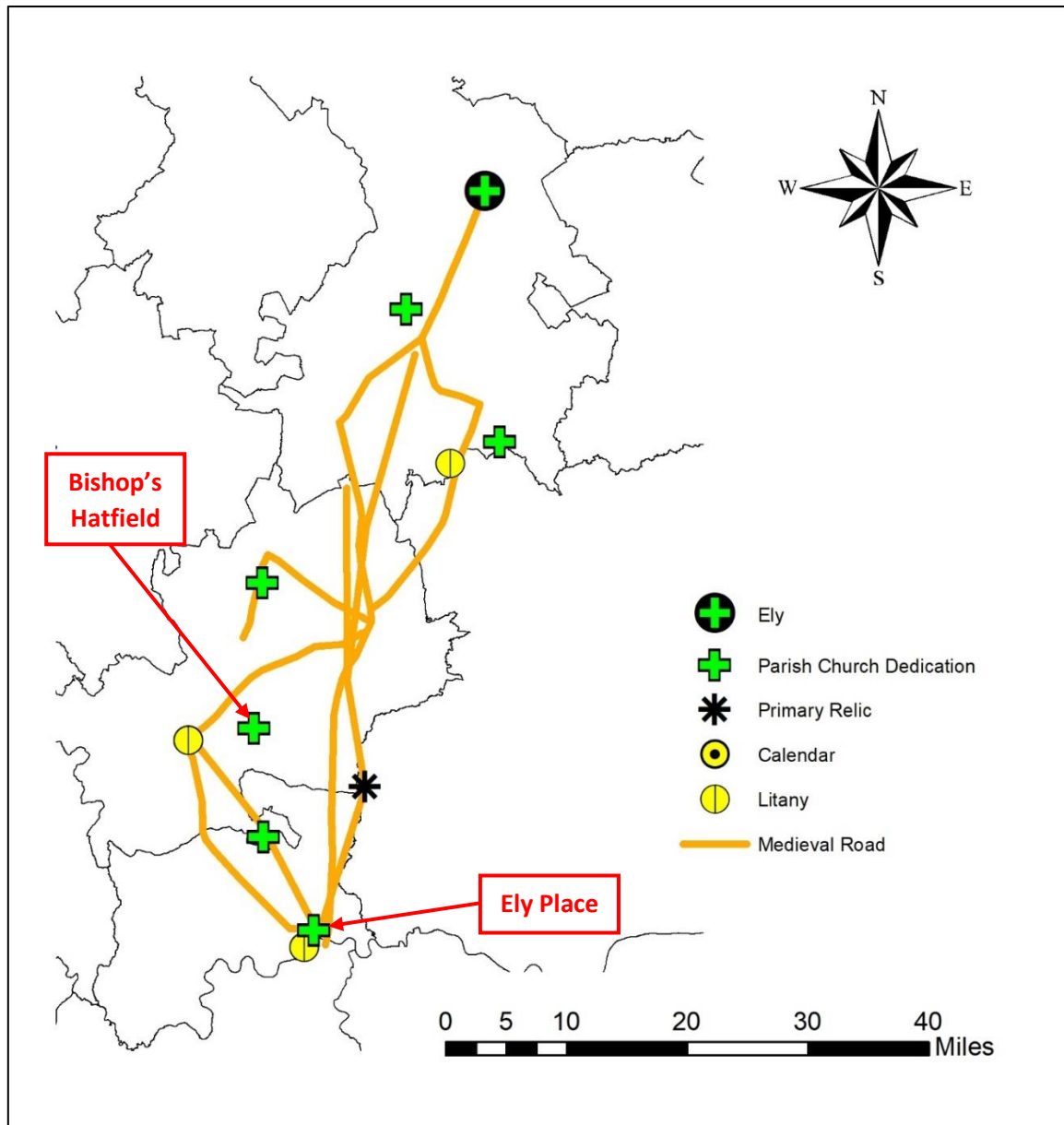


Figure 44. The Potential Route to the South of Ely.

The *LE* is again key in understanding the origins of the dedications, but unlike the route through Lincolnshire, the evidence does not necessarily point to veneration of the shrine of Æthelthryth at Ely as a key activity along this route. Instead journeys to and from Ely incorporating the churches dedicated to the saint were far more likely to be made by ecclesiastical than by lay communities. The churches at Ely Place in London and twenty miles north at Bishop's Hatfield were both built on land owned by the see of Ely and were the sites of bishops' palaces. Ely

Place was the official residence of the bishop of Ely in London, while Hatfield was a convenient stopping-off point on the journey between London and Ely, and the road between the two palaces would have been very well-travelled, as they lie on the route of Watling Street, an ancient trackway that was paved in Roman times. A number of the other churches along the route were also situated on land that had been donated to Ely during the reign of King Edgar,<sup>81</sup> and the dedications are very likely to have been made as a result of the gift of the land to the abbey.

The final cluster of churches situated in the southwest of England is unusual because of its distance from Ely. There is only one parish church dedication in this area – St Audries on the north Somerset coast at West Quantoxhead – and activity relating to Æthelthryth was centred around the Augustinian abbey dedicated to the saint at Canonsleigh on the border between Somerset and Devon. The Canonsleigh dedication dates from 1284, which is when the community of canons who had been its occupants for the previous century were replaced with canonesses on the instructions of the bishop of Exeter.<sup>82</sup> The dedication of the parish church at West Quantoxhead could be contemporary with that of the abbey,<sup>83</sup> and their proximity to each other – they are twenty miles, or one day's journey, apart – indicates that a link between them is a possibility.

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<sup>81</sup> Namely Linton and Histon in Cambridgeshire, and Totteridge in Hertfordshire. See Chapter 2, pp. 97-98, above, for a more detailed description of the churches' histories, and *LE(B)*, Book II, chs. 9 and 62, pp. 81-82 and 133-36, and Book III, ch. 48, pp. 287-288, for the historical records.

<sup>82</sup> See Frederick T Elworthy, 'Canonsleigh', *Reports and Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 24 (1892), p. 366. The abbey was founded in the second half of the twelfth century and was originally dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist.

<sup>83</sup> See pp. 246-248, above.

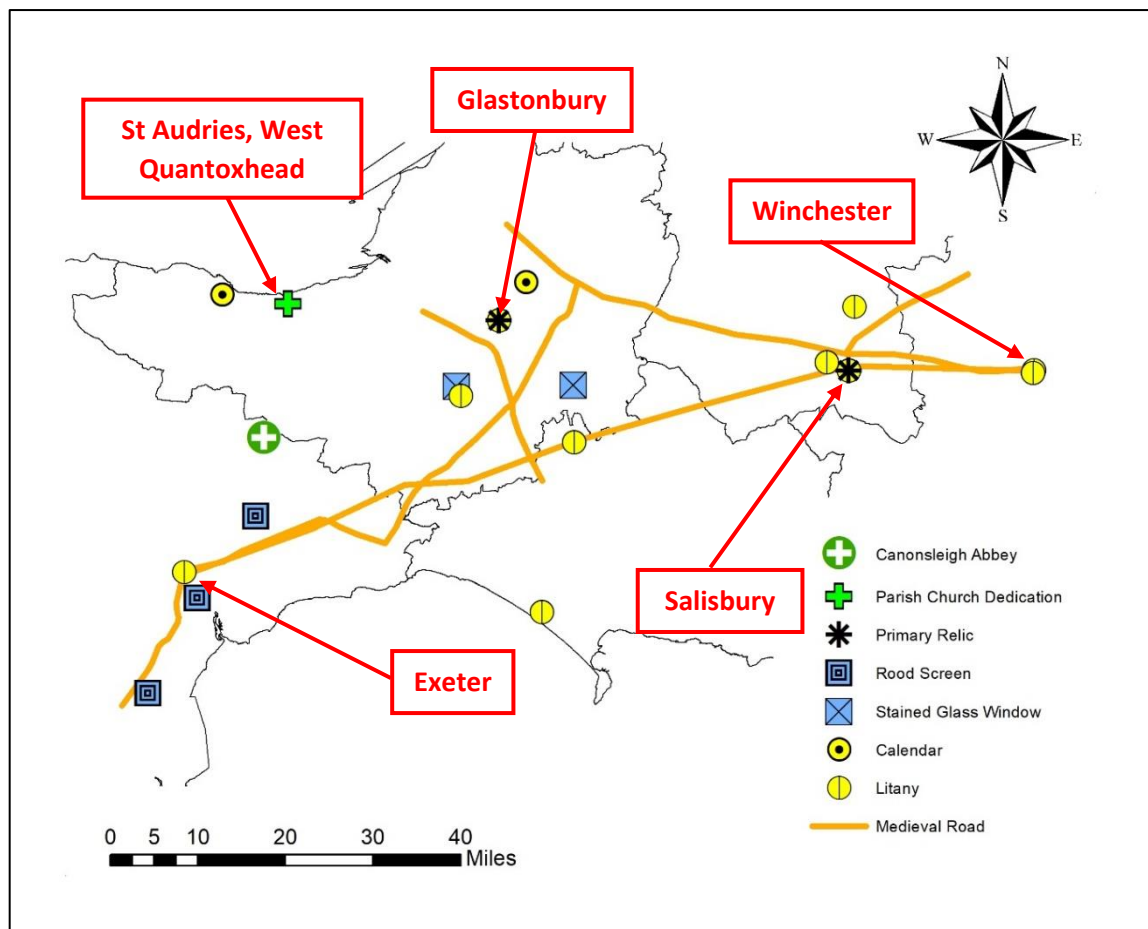


Figure 45. The Potential Pilgrimage Routes through Somerset and Devon.

The addition of the locations of churches containing images of Æthelthryth and the royal itineraries does provide some evidence of potential routeways between the southwestern sites, but it is by no means as compelling as that for the sites in Lincolnshire. Four of the five churches with either rood-screens or stained glass windows of the saint lie on or very close to the network of roads identified by Hindle's analysis, and of these the two to the east of Canonsleigh Abbey, at Langport and North Cadbury, are also located only fifteen miles from Glastonbury Abbey, which claimed to hold a relic of Æthelthryth in its collection.<sup>84</sup> The other two churches, at Kenn and Plymtree in Devon, are situated further to the southwest along the same route as

<sup>84</sup> Carley and Howley, *Relics at Glastonbury in the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 569-570.



that linking the Somerset churches with Glastonbury, and which also includes the diocesan seat of Exeter. The proposition, therefore, of a pilgrimage route that incorporated the four churches and the site of the relic of Æthelthryth at Glastonbury Abbey along this established road is a feasible one. The inclusion of Canonsleigh Abbey and St Audries church in this potential route are less evident, however. There are no immediately obvious major route-ways that linked the Exeter-Glastonbury road with either Canonsleigh or West Quantoxhead, although the distances between them do not preclude the possibility of smaller, local routes being used to incorporate them in any pilgrimage itinerary. One day's walk would bring the traveller to Canonsleigh Abbey from Plymtree, with a further day needed to reach St Audries church, from where it would be possible to re-join the more established route at Langport in Somerset. A major medieval road also stretched from Exeter through Sherborne to Salisbury and Winchester, all of which had links to Æthelthryth. Salisbury's sixteenth-century relic list claimed the abbey held a fragment of the saint,<sup>85</sup> while calendrical evidence shows that both Sherborne and Winchester celebrated Æthelthryth's feast days. It would therefore have been possible to incorporate several major shrine centres with connections to Æthelthryth along with a number of parish churches in one journey.

## Conclusion

The detailed analysis of the clusters of churches that have been identified here produces a mixture of hypotheses as to the connections between them and the religious centres with links to Æthelthryth, and the potential routes that medieval travellers could have used to travel to them. Relatively strong evidence supports the claim for the existence of a pilgrimage route through Lincolnshire to Ely, following the path of Æthelthryth's own journey from Coldingham, and incorporating the claimed locations of her relics at York and Durham, and the sites of

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<sup>85</sup> Wordsworth, ed., *Ceremonies and Processions of the Cathedral Church of Salisbury*, pp. 33-40.

miracles at West Halton and Stow Green. Slightly less evidentially compelling, but still nonetheless an intriguing supposition, is the possibility of a route in the southwest of England that includes another claimed relic site, Glastonbury Abbey, with Canonsleigh Abbey and a number of churches containing images of the saint. The separate location of this cluster of sites, isolated as they are from the heartland of Æthelthryth's cult in East Anglia, definitely indicates a focus of activity remote from Ely, but which could have been centred on Canonsleigh Abbey, and promoted by the foundation's canonesses who chose Æthelthryth as their patron.

The likelihood that local pilgrimages were more common than longer-distance journeys was the conclusion that can be drawn from the evidence presented for East Anglia, principally because of the plethora of locations containing rood-screens and stained glass images of Æthelthryth. Travellers would have used the network of roads and tracks linking the towns and villages of Norfolk with each other and with the major centres of the area, and then converged on the very few available routes across the Fens to reach the shrine of Æthelthryth at Ely. In contrast to this scenario, it is ecclesiastical journeys that are evidenced by the locations of churches dedicated to the saint to the south of Ely, with the two bishops' palaces in London and Hatfield and the establishment of churches on land donated to the abbey following the line of the main route between Ely and the capital. The absence of images of the saint when compared to the other clusters – especially in Norfolk – adds weight to the supposition that pilgrims wishing to visit sites relating to Æthelthryth were less likely to use this route than any of the other three outlined here.

It is evident from this exercise that the extent of the influence of Æthelthryth's cult in the later Middle Ages is more complex than the application of labels such as 'local', 'regional' or 'national' implies. There are elements of all three descriptions contained in the evaluation of the distribution of the locations linked to the saint, as well as more than one dimension to the motivation behind the journeys in the different areas. Pilgrimage was a very important element

in the spread of Æthelthryth's influence, but it was not the only one, as the activities of the ecclesiastical community of Ely played a significant part as well. The hypothesis that parish churches in East Anglia indicate the existence of interim destinations and routes for pilgrims travelling between the major shrine centres of the area needs further work to validate its efficacy, mainly involving more detailed mapping of the infrastructure that would have existed to aid travellers at this time. However, the locations and grouping of the churches containing images of Æthelthryth do reveal tantalising patterns with the suggestion of route-ways, especially when the known pilgrimage route between Ely and Walsingham is overlaid, and the opportunity to visit and venerate images of the saint whose relics to which the pilgrim was travelling seems a natural one to take.

The analysis of the images found on rood-screens, walls, and in stained glass windows has demonstrated the depth of piety and belief that the parishioners of the parish churches had for their local saints, and in East Anglia for Æthelthryth in particular. The localised nature of her cult during the fourteenth and fifteenth century is emphasised by the proportion of her images that were located in the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire, although the connection with the southwest through Canonsleigh Abbey shows that Æthelthryth's influence was still able to reach outside of her heartland.

## **CONCLUSION**

The core objective of this thesis was to understand the influence of the cult of St Æthelthryth of Ely. In fulfilling this goal, it has addressed three specific research questions. Firstly, what was the geographical reach of her cult? Secondly, what were the factors that contributed to the cult's longevity? And thirdly, what was its impact? It was also the intention of this thesis to explore the ways in which digital humanities tools, and specifically GIS, could be used to help to provide the answers to these questions. Finally, the results of this investigation into Æthelthryth's cult and the conclusions drawn from it would inevitably not always just be relevant to her cult in isolation, and therefore the impact and ramifications of the thesis's findings on the wider study of the cult of saints in England have also been explored and articulated.

From a geographical perspective, since the very beginning of the research into Æthelthryth it was always an aspiration to be able to use the capabilities of the GIS to produce a single map that would illustrate the cult's influence in a succinct, clear way, revealing patterns of activity and connections between locations that would never have been apparent otherwise. The map on the following page (Figure 46) is a fair reflection of the geographical extent of the cult of Æthelthryth in England and Scotland from just before her death in 679 until the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the disbursement of her relics in c. 1540, and serves to highlight several discreet areas of influence.

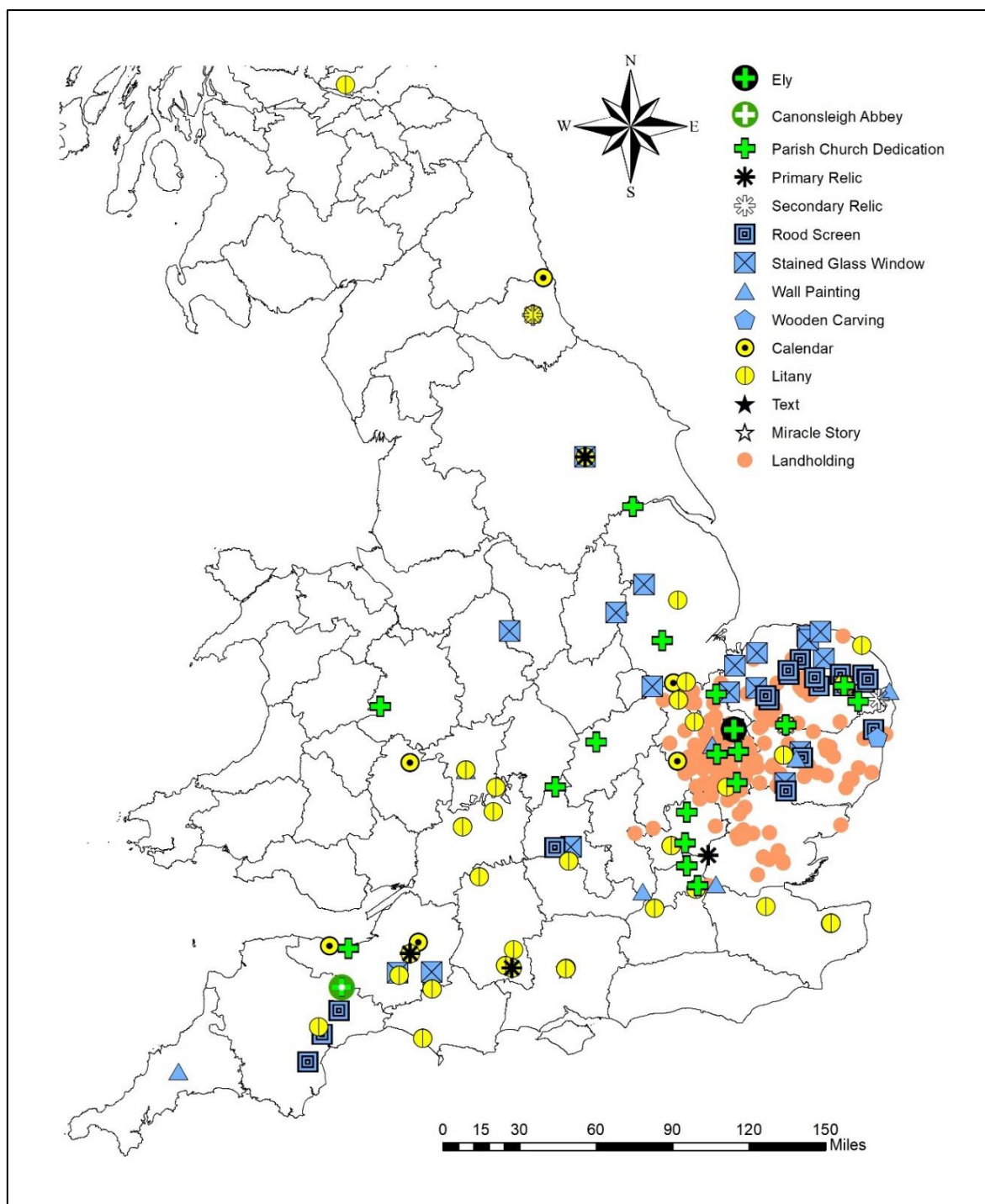


Figure 46. The Geographical Extent of the Cult of St Æthelthryth across England and Scotland.

However, the map only tells part of the story. It does demonstrate the range and complexity of Æthelthryth's cult and the variety of sources that are available to the historian whose goal it is to try to articulate its scope and influence. However, this thesis has shown that knowledge of her cult transcended the borders of the British Isles, with calendrical evidence demonstrating that her feast day was being celebrated in Francia as early as the eighth century and in Scandinavia from the eleventh century onwards, with the spread of Christianity through Denmark, Norway, and Sweden broadly mirrored by the locations and dates of origin of the Scandinavian calendars themselves. A late fifteenth-century Book of Hours that contains the saint's feast day has also very recently come to light in the Lilly Library of Indiana University, Bloomington, the origin of which has been identified as Bruges in Flanders,<sup>1</sup> thus providing further evidence of the spread of Æthelthryth's cult within continental Europe by the end of the Middle Ages.

A standalone map also cannot fully reflect the chronological development of the cult within the borders of Britain, compressing as it does nine centuries of cultic activity into a single snapshot. This thesis has demonstrated that in actual fact the geographical reach of Æthelthryth's cult is far better illustrated as a series of spheres of influence, the longevity and extent of which were governed by the actions and interventions of those whose ambitions and goals were dependent upon the promotion of the saint's story or example. Each of these has been mapped and discussed in their own right within the body of the thesis. Even taking into account the chronological limitations of the static map above, the sphere of influence centred on Ely and East Anglia is clearly visible from the amount of activity, and the layers of evidence sources contained within it provide an indication of the foundation's changing fortunes throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> The manuscript is Bloomington IND, Lilly Library, MS Adomeit 21, and was exhibited as part of a conference hosted by Indiana University in the spring of 2019 that was attended by the author. The exhibition description was 'Book of Hours, Use of Rome. Southern Netherlands (Bruges), 15<sup>th</sup> century. Latin. Adomeit 21', but unfortunately nothing of its provenance is known any earlier than 1756, when it was inscribed on the flyleaf. See Christopher De Hamel, *Gilding the Lilly: A Hundred Medieval and Illuminated Manuscripts in the Lilly Library* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2010), pp. 160-161.

lifetime of Æthelthryth's cult. Beginning in Ely itself with Seaxburh's translation of her sister's remains, possibly in an attempt to preserve the legacy of her father King Ana, the cult's geographical extent was not increased to any great degree for nearly three centuries. However, its rapid expansion at the end of the tenth century, made possible as a result of the adoption of the saint as a role model by the Benedictine bishop Æthelwold, is represented on the map by the extent of the foundation's landholdings that were acquired as part of his reform strategy, and of which Æthelthryth was specifically named in the charters as custodian. This sphere of influence grew as land was acquired first in Cambridgeshire and then throughout the rest of the region, reaching its peak in the middle of the eleventh century. From this point on Ely's influence diminished as the foundation's land was appropriated by powerful noblemen who were faced with a series of weak or ineffective abbots. The culmination of this period of contraction was Ely's isolation and final submission to Norman control during and immediately after the Siege of Ely in 1070. Æthelthryth's influence at this time was almost exclusively concentrated at the shrine itself, demonstrated firstly by the rebel leader Hereward's decree that anyone joining him must first pledge their allegiance at the saint's tomb, and subsequently by William the Conqueror recognising, again while at her tomb, Æthelthryth's power and therefore her usefulness in preventing further unrest in the local area.

Norman rule brought with it the beginning of another reversal of the foundation's fortunes which was to continue over the next four centuries, with its power (and once again its landholding) expanding throughout East Anglia, and which also saw the creation of the bishopric of Ely in 1109. This expansion is mirrored by the spread of the celebration of Æthelthryth's feast days into monasteries and abbeys throughout the region, illustrated on the map above by the locations of calendars and litanies containing her name, and the claims of some of these institutions of being in possession of primary or secondary relics of the saint. The geographical distribution in East Anglia of these three evidence types – landholding, calendars and litanies, and relics – illustrates the extent of the largest and longest-lived sphere of influence of the cult

of Æthelthryth from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, and is representative of the focus of venerative activity during this period, which was primarily within the large ecclesiastical foundations. This concentration of ecclesiastical power was to change in the later Middle Ages, however, and the representation on the map of the East Anglian sphere of influence of Æthelthryth's cult is again demonstrative of this shift. The blue symbols shown are the locations of images of Æthelthryth within parish churches, the vast majority of which originate from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, and they indicate how veneration of the saint was increasingly being undertaken in local churches and that the parishioners, who had responsibility for the naves of their churches, were thus deciding whose images would appear within them. This was a trend that was to continue up until the Reformation in the sixteenth century.

Another sphere of influence that can be seen on the map, and that has been identified for the first time as a result of this research into her cult, is in the southwest of England, a region geographically remote from East Anglia and therefore not an obvious location for veneration of an Ely saint. There is only one church dedication in the area, that of St Audries at West Quantoxhead in Somerset, which Nicholas Orme has suggested might date from as late as the eighteenth century and, due to its isolation from other Æthelthryth dedications, that was the result of a calendrical link.<sup>2</sup> However, the additional information collated within this study from parish churches, ecclesiastical calendars, and the cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey has unveiled a far greater level of activity relating to Æthelthryth in this area than was previously recognised. The evidence points to an area of influence for her cult, possibly centred on the abbey at Canonsleigh, with potential pilgrimage routes linking sites related to her with the shrine centres at Exeter, Glastonbury, Salisbury, and Winchester. Discussions with a local historian have even revealed the local belief that Æthelthryth visited the area and founded a priory on the north Somerset coast, although this is highly unlikely. The region's links with Æthelthryth's cult that

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<sup>2</sup> This was suggested to me in email correspondence with Professor Orme, April 2017. I am grateful to him for his reply, and for his information regarding Canonsleigh Abbey.



have been demonstrated here require further investigation before any definitive conclusions as to their origin can be drawn (for instance, very little research has been undertaken on Canonsleigh Abbey itself, let alone the reasons behind its dedication to Æthelthryth),<sup>3</sup> however, these investigations have presented several intriguing theories upon which future research could be based. Æthelthryth's cult was dynamic and constantly evolving in nature, and in answering the question regarding its geographical reach, the evidence from Scandinavia, East Anglia, and the southwest of England has suggested that identifying and defining its spheres of influence provides far greater clarity and accuracy than using labels such as local, regional, or national to describe her sainthood. It is through the consideration of these spheres of influence within this thesis, both separately and collectively, that the geographical extent of the influence of the saint has been defined.

The answers to the second and third research questions framed above, i.e. the factors governing Æthelthryth's cult's longevity and its impact, are intertwined. The principal reason her cult survived for nearly nine hundred years was *because* of its effectiveness. Its longevity (and indeed its survival initially beyond the end of the ninth century) was principally due to the diversity of patronage and promotion it received, but this endorsement and backing would not have been forthcoming had Æthelthryth's character and story not been flexible enough to have been applied to a wide variety of circumstances and messages. The texts of her life and afterlife portrayed her in a number of different guises, ranging from humble and pious virginal nun, to authoritative princess, queen, or abbess, to vengeful and sometimes violent protector and defender of Ely's interests, and even to nationalistic symbol of a long-past English 'golden age'.

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<sup>3</sup> Frederick Elworthy described the ruins of the abbey and pieced together its medieval history from local records for the Devonshire Local History Society in 1892, (see Elworthy, 'Canonsleigh'), and its cartulary from 1323 was transcribed in 1965 by Vera London (see Vera C M London, ed., *The Cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey (Harleian MS. no. 3660): A Calendar* (Torquay, 1965)). The only modern scholarship is an article published by Desmond Atkinson in 2015 which charts its prosperity through the late Middle Ages until the Reformation, see Desmond Atkinson, 'Canonsleigh Abbey: A Thriving Devonshire Nunnery?', *Ex Historia*, 7 (2015).

Earlier in this thesis, Æthelthryth has been referred to as a ‘saint for all seasons’, and the variety of characterisations of her are testament to the appropriateness of this description. Each adaptation of her character played an important role in helping to achieve the aims and objectives of the protagonists about whose causes she was written and depicted, and it is argued here that the adaptability of her character was the principal reason her cult was able to outlast the majority of those of other Anglo-Saxon saints. The relationship between the saint and those who utilised her as a role model or exemplar was by no means one-sided, however. In order to reach and have an impact upon the largest or most influential audiences, the stories and messages being conveyed had to be promoted, and it was this promotion of Æthelthryth’s cult that ensured knowledge of her came to be so widely disseminated, as demonstrated in this thesis through the extent of its geographical reach. Evidence of this symbiosis from across the lifetime of the cult, and which manifested itself in a number of different ways, has been presented here. Bede’s selective account of Æthelthryth’s life and death in the *HE* – he consistently emphasised her virginity and piety (his ‘hymn to virginity’ is a case in point here) while downplaying her royal lineage – is the earliest example and is discussed in Chapter One. Æthelthryth was an exemplar of the behaviours that Bede wanted adopted by the Northumbrian church, and the *HE* was the vehicle through which he was able to disseminate his message. The popularity of Bede’s writing, which resulted in the *HE* being copied and distributed many times, had the effect of promoting the lives of the saints about whom he had written, and of whom Æthelthryth was a prominent example. The Viking raids of the eighth and ninth centuries were devastating to the Ely foundation, and it is unlikely that Æthelthryth’s cult would have survived had it not been for Bede’s hagiography, which was to become the basis for the virtually all of the later *vitae* of the saint. It also enabled her cult’s sphere of influence to reach across the North Sea as early as the eighth century, as the evidence of the Munich calendar fragment has demonstrated.

While Bede's *vita* was to become the hagiographic template of Æthelthryth's life upon which almost all successive accounts were based, each was to portray the saint in the way most likely to help achieve the ambitions of those commissioning them. In the tenth century, the images of Æthelthryth contained in Æthelwold's Benedictional (discussed in Chapter Two), while not ignoring her virtuousness and chastity, reinforced the importance of the link between royalty and monasticism that Æthelwold was establishing through the Benedictine Reforms and with the sponsorship of King Edgar. At the same time, the inclusion of a set of Æthelthryth's miracle stories within Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*, which was written in Old English rather than Latin and thus possibly for a wider audience and not just the ecclesiastical elite, warned of the consequences of not following the Rule of Benedict. The rapid conversion of a number of East Anglian monasteries to Benedictinism, which commenced with Ely in 970, is testament to Æthelwold's success as a reformer, and the two texts he was likely to have commissioned are evidence that the cult of Æthelthryth was one of the principal tools with which he believed he would achieve his goal. From his scriptorium at Winchester, Æthelwold was also responsible for producing and disseminating a large number of texts to the other Benedictine foundations of the south and east of England. The calendrical evidence gathered in this thesis shows that Æthelthryth's feast day was being celebrated and her story told throughout these regions by the mid-eleventh century, an indication that Æthelwold's adoption of her as a symbol of his reforms was also the catalyst for the spread of her cult across the network of Benedictine abbeys.

There are several other textual examples described within this thesis that demonstrate how Æthelthryth's character was used by the commissioners of her *vitae*. In the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the production of a *miracula* attributed to Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and a *vita* written by Gregory, an Ely monk, (both of which are discussed in Chapter Three) were an integral part of a plan for Ely to break from the diocese of Lincoln and form its own bishopric. In light of this aim, Æthelthryth is portrayed as the defender of Ely's interests, loyal to the abbey's community and fiercely protective of it against any threats. Æthelthryth's benevolence and

patronage are the prominent characteristics in the thirteenth-century *Life* by Marie de France (described in Chapter Four), probably written at the Benedictine abbey of Chatteris and extant in a fourteenth-century copy from Campsey Ash Priory. While not claiming to prove an absolute causative effect between the production of the *vita* and the foundations' fortunes, the analysis in this thesis of their relative wealth does indicate a link between the stories of saintly patronage and the generosity of the institutions' residents. Finally, an analysis of the fifteenth-century *Wilton (L)* of Æthelthryth (also in Chapter Four), has led to the suggestion that her character could have been used as part of Henry V's propaganda campaign against the French during the Hundred Years' War.

The deliberate manipulation of Æthelthryth's character was not limited to the textual narratives of her life and afterlife, however. The comparison of the later medieval images of her that can be found on the parish church rood-screens of East Anglia and Devon (discussed in Chapter Five) show how the different portrayals of her were targeted at specific audiences, while the placement of her images in relation to other saints was indicative of her relative importance. These images, the number of which still exist hints at how prevalent they were prior to the iconoclasms of the Reformation and the English Civil War, are an indication of how powerful they were believed to be in delivering a particular message to the congregation who sat facing them. Similarly, they are evidence that at the end of the fifteenth century the cult of Æthelthryth was increasingly being popularised and promoted through the parish church network. On the one hand, the various portrayals of Æthelthryth described in this thesis, both literary and illustrative, and which between them span the more than eight hundred years of her cult's life, are clear evidence that her character's malleability was the principal factor in its longevity. On the other, the utilisation of her story and the harnessing of the perceived influence of her relics by so many and to help achieve such a variety of different goals and objectives are recognition of the impact her cult was able to make during the time it was the subject of veneration. This symbiosis of relationship was key, and without the potential for such

mutual benefit it is unlikely that Æthelthryth's cult would have lasted as long or made the impression that it did.

The conclusions drawn here regarding the longevity and impact of Æthelthryth's cult are not necessarily applicable to hers alone but can be extrapolated to the wider study of the cults of Anglo-Saxon saints in general. Analysis of the pattern of the spheres of influence over the lifetime of her cult has revealed a gradual change in its control towards the end of the fourteenth century, with decisions about which saints to venerate and where to venerate them being made less by the monasteries and cathedrals and more by the parishes and the laity. From the inception of her cult in the seventh century, the relics of Æthelthryth at Ely were the obvious focus of veneration, and this remained the case through to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as primary and secondary relics of the saint were attracting visitors to other locations such as Glastonbury, York, and Durham. From the middle of the fifteenth century, as images of Æthelthryth begin to appear in increasing numbers in the parish churches of East Anglia, so this signified a shift in the venerative practices surrounding the saint. This shift in the focus of control of veneration of Æthelthryth cannot have been a trend that was limited to her cult alone but is indicative of a more universal change with parishes and parishioners having an increasing say in the decisions around who and how to venerate. This was the period within which great numbers of parish churches were being extended and remodified and coincided with responsibility for the nave of the church passing from the clergy to the congregation. Liability for the nave's upkeep also meant control over its decoration and adornment, and this analysis indicates that the parishioners were using this new-found authority to select images of saints with whom they had the greatest affinity. The power of the major shrine centres to govern the activities of worshippers and penitents had not disappeared, but control was increasingly being ceded to the parish churches and the laity who were able to use it to influence the cultic practices of their parishioners and visitors.

The model for articulating the geographical and temporal extent of a saint's influence that has been developed and applied within this study to the cult of St Æthelthryth of Ely is also readily applicable to other saints' cults. This portability of methodology has been made possible through the use of the GIS to record, store, visualise, and analyse the data gathered from the plethora of sources explored. As has been mentioned previously, a GIS is effectively a database of information to which locational data has been appended. It is therefore a relatively simple exercise to add to this information store with the details of the locations of, for example, church dedications, material culture, ecclesiastical calendars, and litanies that pertain to other saints. The mapping capabilities of the GIS also make visualisation of the distributions of these and the other sources investigated a simple task, and the benefits of even this most basic functionality have been demonstrated a number of times within this thesis. For instance, visualisations have been produced of the geographical distributions of elements as diverse as Scandinavian ecclesiastical calendars and Norfolk rood-screens. The map of the calendrical instances of Æthelthryth's feast days has served to demonstrate the relationship between their distribution and the development of the Christian church across Scandinavia, while the Norfolk rood-screens' map has both highlighted the degree of iconoclasm that occurred during the Reformation and the English Civil War and hinted at the possibility of local pilgrimage taking place across the Fens to Ely. These two examples are demonstrative of the power of using the GIS to map the elements of a single source, and its use with those of other cults would no doubt highlight otherwise less-recognisable patterns in the data from which further research could stem.

The analytical capabilities of the GIS are by far its most powerful elements, however, and it is through their application to multiple evidence sources that the longer-term themes relating to the cult of Æthelthryth have been brought to light. Studies that have concentrated on a particular period or event in the chronology of a saint's cult have by their nature been unable to identify themes that shaped its evolution sometimes over tens or even hundreds of years. One

of the advantages of undertaking a longitudinal study such as this one is that the evidence of these themes is collated in its entirety, while the application of the analytical capabilities of the GIS allows them to be recognised and their significance researched and understood. The patterns of land appropriation that formed the basis of the analysis into the development of Ely during the tenth and early eleventh centuries became much clearer once the landholding data had been represented on the series of maps contained within Chapter Two. The power of these maps was then enhanced much further through the ability to overlay other information, such as the locations of church dedications, guilds, and litanies, which highlighted the change in strategy of the Benedictine bishops in the eleventh century away from land acquisition and towards that of a textual tradition. In a similar vein, overlaying the material culture data with medieval routes taken from the Gough Map and the royal itineraries has revealed evidence to support the hypotheses relating to pilgrimage routes to and from sites with significance to Æthelthryth that are outlined in Chapter Five. It is clear that, given the availability of the evidence sources in the first place, the application of a GIS to the information that can be gathered on a saint's cult provides a framework within which it can be presented and analysed. This capability both reduces the time and effort needed to display the information, thus allowing more for understanding its relevance and significance, while also highlighting links and relationships that would not otherwise have been evident.

Extending the scope of a study such as this one to incorporate the cults of other saints would not only allow the geographical and chronological extent of their individual influence to be investigated and understood, it would also provide the mechanisms through which questions regarding the interactions between and across multiple cults and shrine centres could be addressed. For instance, it has been suggested (in Chapter Three) that the production of the *LE* towards the end of the twelfth century was in part a response to the canonisation of Thomas Becket in 1173 which led to an increase in pilgrimage to his tomb at Canterbury. It is likely that an event such as this would have had a detrimental effect on the popularity (and therefore the

geographical reach) of not only the cult of Æthelthryth, but of many other cults. The impact of the 'Becket effect' can be seen through a comparison of the amounts collected at the shrines, based perhaps on records collated by Nilson for instance,<sup>4</sup> but this would provide only a one-dimensional view of the effect of the increasing popularity of Becket's shrine. The availability of a database of evidence such as that collated here for Æthelthryth, but relating to a number of the major shrine centres in England and overlaid with a GIS, would provide the framework not only to gauge the effect of Becket's cult, but also to understand the responses to it of the other shrine centres in a multi-layered, longitudinal way. Similarly, it has been suggested that shrine centres located in the vicinity of each other have both detrimental and beneficial effects.<sup>5</sup> Again, this assertion is principally based on an interrogation of cathedral financial records augmented by anecdotal accounts. Mapping the spheres of influence of shrine centres located in close proximity to each other would identify where overlaps existed and highlight the shrines' individual and collective responses to the threats or opportunities presented by their immediate neighbours.

One of the principal findings of this research into the influence of Æthelthryth was the identification of a number of potential pilgrimage routes focussed either on her shrine at Ely or other locations with significance to her life and story, the routes of which are mapped and explained in Chapter Five. These have only become evident through the application of the GIS to the multiple evidence sources, combined with an overlay of known medieval routeways derived from the Gough Map and royal itineraries. This layering of evidence types, which is a

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<sup>4</sup> See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England*, pp. 215-226.

<sup>5</sup> Diana Webb states that the shrines of Wulfstan and Oswald at Worcester were the subject of both 'competition and passing trade' from centres such as Gloucester and Hereford, see Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 121. Ute Engel uses the examples of miracle stories that effectively recommend the benefits of one saint over another to highlight the competition between Worcester and Hereford (see Ute Engel, *Worcester Cathedral: An Architectural History* (Chichester, 2007), p. 199), while a fourteenth-century monk's testimony specifically accredits an increase in Worcester's income to the cathedral being located on the route to Hereford, see Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England*, p. 160, and Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, pp. 34 and 124.



fundamental capability of any GIS, has revealed patterns within the data relating to Æthelthryth which have then been grouped into four clusters, each of which has been linked to the known medieval routeways located in the vicinity. There is evidence of a long-distance route from Coldingham in Northumbria to Ely, another in the southwest of England centred on Canonsleigh Abbey, a route between Ely and London that was probably used by the ecclesiastical elite as they travelled between bishops' palaces, and a network of smaller, local routes in Norfolk that converged on the shrine at Ely. The two longer-distance routes incorporated major shrine centres such as Durham, York, Glastonbury, and Salisbury that held – or claimed to hold – relics of Æthelthryth, as well as a number of other foundations where calendrical evidence has indicated that her feast day was being celebrated. The occurrence of these interim destinations located along or near to the proposed routes suggests that pilgrims were visiting locations related to the saint as a precursor to reaching their ultimate goal, which was a shrine that contained her relics. The visits to these interim locations, some of which appear to be roughly a day's travel apart and that therefore could have acted as overnight stops, could have served to build up the anticipation of the traveller before their arrival at the shrine itself, much as a warm-up act builds the sense of expectation prior to the appearance of the headline performers at a concert today. The images of the saint that were a feature of the network of parish churches identified in East Anglia could have served a similar purpose, but on a smaller, more localised scale. Shorter-distance journeys to the shrine at Ely could have incorporated a number of parish churches within which the pilgrim would have been able to view images of the saint, the relics of whom were his ultimate destination.

While the arguments supporting the existence of these pilgrimage routes relating to the saint are compelling, they could be further enhanced with the incorporation of topographical data and information pertaining to the infrastructure such as inns, hospitals, and bridges that

pilgrims would have made use of on their journeys.<sup>6</sup> Also, the travellers would not necessarily have undertaken pilgrimages to the sites of just one single saint, but may well have included locations pertaining to a number of different saints. Ely, for instance, is located in the vicinity of Walsingham, Peterborough, Ramsey, Bury St Edmunds, and St Alban's, some or all of which could have been included in one pilgrimage itinerary. The incorporation of information relating to the saints of these nearby shrine centres into a GIS could reveal further patterns of pilgrimage that are not evident from the information for Æthelthryth alone.

No database holding the information relating to Anglo-Saxon saints along the lines of that discussed here currently exists, even on a small scale, and consequently the types of longitudinal and multi-layered research outlined above, and that has been undertaken in microcosm within this thesis with respect to Æthelthryth, are either not being done, or are being limited in their scope. There is, however, a precedent being set for a similar approach to that outlined above relating to the cults of saints in Scandinavia. The Mapping Lived Religion project, run jointly between Linnaeus University, Växjö, and the Center for Digital Humanities at Gothenburg University and which commenced in February 2019, is aiming to build and populate an open-access database of information collated from extant collections and previous research relating to the cults of saints in Sweden and Finland between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> The database will enable the creation of digital maps allowing researchers to access information geographically, chronologically, and by individual saint, and will therefore provide the capability to answer for Scandinavian saints the types of questions suggested above. The opportunities that this type of development would present for research into the cults of Anglo-Saxon saints are numerous and varied.

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Locker incorporates features such as these into his investigations into the pilgrimage way between Ely and Walsingham, see Locker, *Landscapes of Pilgrimage*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>7</sup> 'Mapping Lived Religion: Medieval Cults of Saints in Sweden and Finland', (2019), <https://lnu.se/en/research/searchresearch/forskningsprojekt/mapping-lived-religion-medieval-cults-of-saints-in-sweden-and-finland/>, accessed 17 May 2019.

The deliberately wide-ranging nature of this research into Æthelthryth's cult has revealed opportunities for further research that would add to its impact both within the chronological boundaries defined in this thesis, as well as after the Reformation. A number of the geographic areas that have been identified as spheres of influence relating to Æthelthryth's cult would be ideal foci of further study in their own right. As has been mentioned previously, the collection of sites centred on Canonsleigh Abbey in the southwest of England, which has hitherto been the subject of very little investigation, is one such location. Similarly, Æthelthryth's links with the medieval Church in Scandinavia are tantalising and invite further research to ascertain whether her cult was embedded more deeply in its development. Scandinavian written sources are fewer in number than English ones, but the adoption of English and Frankish saints was a characteristic of early Middle Age religion there, and so the approach of collating multiple sources as has been done within this study may well be an effective methodology. Finally, the recent discovery by this study's author of the Flemish Book of Hours that contains a calendrical reference to Æthelthryth's feast day may be an indication of greater knowledge of her cult within continental Europe than has been understood previously. With the Munich calendar fragment from the eighth century being the only evidence prior to this of Æthelthryth's cult in Europe, a reasonable assumption would be that its existence there was short-lived. However, the discovery of the Bruges Book of Hours potentially refutes this hypothesis and presents the opportunity for further research into the extent and longevity of her cult in mainland Europe.

The cult of Æthelthryth was not completely extinguished when the shrine at Ely was destroyed and the saint's relics removed in 1541. Blanton mentions a printed version of the *Life* of Æthelthryth dating from the early seventeenth century that was based on the sixteenth-century *New English Legendary*, a collection of saints' lives that was itself a copy of a fourteenth-century collation by John of Tynemouth.<sup>8</sup> Also, a relic that is purported to be the saint's left hand is on

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<sup>8</sup> See table of *Vitae Ætheldredæ* in Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 10.

display in the Roman Catholic parish church in Ely. The journey it undertook prior to arriving at its current location less than one hundred years ago includes its discovery behind a wall in a Catholic family's house in Arundel, West Sussex in the eighteenth century, its subsequent removal to a nunnery in Staffordshire, and its donation to the church of St Etheldreda in Ely Place in London. However, the period between its removal from Ely and its discovery in Sussex, covering some two centuries, remains a mystery. It is not known, for instance, even whether the hand relic is Anglo-Saxon in origin, and radiocarbon dating would need to be undertaken to ascertain this. While permission for this would no doubt be extremely difficult to obtain, a precedent for this type of activity has been set recently with the analysis undertaken on the hand of St James from Reading Abbey, which has been radiocarbon dated to c.1000, and therefore has been proven to not be that of James.<sup>9</sup> There are therefore intriguing pieces of evidence that the cult of Æthelthryth might have continued after the Reformation, maybe via the network of Catholic sympathisers. Research into the post-Reformation evidence of her cult could therefore potentially extend its influence even further than the eight hundred and fifty years covered in this thesis.

There are, however, a few remaining obvious and accessible vestigial elements of Æthelthryth's cult: the relic (maybe!) of her hand in its case on the wall of the Catholic church in Ely, the ceremony that takes place annually on her feast day at St Etheldreda's church in London, and the statues, images, and guides' stories that attract numerous visitors to Ely Cathedral. Even without the evidence to positively prove its continuation after the Reformation, the cult of St Æthelthryth was still one of the longest-lived in England. The evidence contained within this thesis has shown that its extent stretched from the Fenlands of Cambridgeshire to Northumbria,

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<sup>9</sup> The hand was analysed by the Oxford University Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art in late 2018, and the results were released in early 2019 to St Peter's church in Marlow, where the relic had been housed since the beginning of the twentieth century. The full report will appear in 'Radiocarbon Dating of the Hand of St James', *Archaeometry*, forthcoming. My thanks to John Wand of the National Churches Trust for early sight of the results of this analysis.

to the southwest of England, to Scandinavia, and to continental Europe at various times over its nine-hundred-year history. The multi-faceted nature of her character as represented in the numerous texts and images produced across this period ensured her cult's longevity. Her cult was promoted to further the causes of figures such as Bede, Æthelwold, Hereward, and William I, and St Æthelthryth acted as a role model and focus of veneration for pilgrims and visitors of the largest cathedrals to the smallest parish churches. It is therefore no exaggeration to state that the 'Saint for all Seasons' was particularly influential in shaping the ecclesiastical history of Ely, East Anglia, and England in the Middle Ages.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – Ely’s Landholdings

Historic Name	Current Name	County	Period of Acquisition	Grid Reference	Source
Chatteris	Chatteris	Cambridgeshire	650-699	TL 39650 86255	Acta William
Isle of Ely	Ely	Cambridgeshire	650-699	TL 53855 80401	Liber Eliensis
Thorney	Thorney	Cambridgeshire	650-699	TF 28310 04354	Liber Eliensis
Whittlesey	Whittlesey	Cambridgeshire	650-699	TL 26869 97216	Acta William
Armingford	Abingdon Pigotts	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 30564 44448	Liber Eliensis
Armingford	Melbourn	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 38549 44553	Liber Eliensis
Berlea	Barley	Hertfordshire	950-999	TL 40159 38499	Liber Eliensis
Bluntisham	Bluntisham	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 37480 74351	Acta William
Clayhithe	Clayhithe	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 49597 65398	Acta William
Dereham	East Dereham	Norfolk	950-999	TF 98836 13312	Liber Eliensis
Ditton	Fen Ditton	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 48333 60195	Acta William
Downham	Little Downham	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 51905 84014	Liber Eliensis
Dullingham	Dullingham	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 63026 57896	Liber Eliensis
Eye	Eye	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TF 22002 01989	Liber Eliensis
Finborough	Great Finborough	Suffolk	950-999	TM 01440 57727	Liber Eliensis
Fulbourn	Fulbourn	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 52363 56310	Liber Eliensis
Haddenham	Haddenham	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 46443 75500	Liber Eliensis
Hadstock	Hadstock	Essex	950-999	TL 55787 44840	Liber Eliensis
Hatfield	Bishop's Hatfield	Hertfordshire	950-999	TL 23423 08557	Liber Eliensis
Hauxton	Hauxton	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 44034 52143	Acta William
Hesberi(e)	Hazeleigh	Essex	950-999	TL 82162 03759	Acta William
Horningsea	Horningsea	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 49384 62509	Acta William
Kelling	Kelling	Norfolk	950-999	TG 09078 42595	Acta William
Kelshall	Kelshall	Hertfordshire	950-999	TL 32972 36388	Liber Eliensis
Linden	Haddenham	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 46443 75500	Liber Eliensis
Linton	Linton	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 56063 46975	Acta William
Linton	Linton	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 56063 46975	Acta William
Marsworth	Marsworth	Buckinghamshire	950-999	SP 92032 14605	Liber Eliensis
Newton	Newton	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 43795 49755	Acta William
Soham	Soham	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 59269 73203	Acta William
Somersham	Somersham	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 36263 77912	Liber Eliensis
Stapleford	Stapleford	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 47498 51488	Acta William
Stoke	Stoke Ash	Suffolk	950-999	TM 11725 70186	Liber Eliensis
Stonea	Stonea	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 42796 88427	Liber Eliensis
Stretley	Streetly End	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 61500 49497	Liber Eliensis
Sudbourne	Sudbourne	Suffolk	950-999	TM 41317 52989	Liber Eliensis
Sutton	Sutton	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 09744 98694	Liber Eliensis
Teversham	Teversham	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 49766 58012	Liber Eliensis
Totteridge	Totteridge	Hertfordshire	950-999	TQ 24668 94489	Liber Eliensis
Wellen	Upwell	Norfolk	950-999	TF 50018 02056	Liber Eliensis
Wellen	Outwell	Norfolk	950-999	TF 51174 04574	Liber Eliensis
Wilburton	Wilburton	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 48342 74900	Liber Eliensis
Witchford	Witchford	Cambridgeshire	950-999	TL 50226 78842	Liber Eliensis
Woodbridge	Woodbridge	Suffolk	950-999	TM 27373 49100	Liber Eliensis

Campsey Ash	Campsey Ash	Suffolk	1050-1099	TM 33096 55995	Acta William
Chedburgh	Chedburgh	Suffolk	1050-1099	TL 78988 57757	Liber Eliensis
Cranwich	Cranwich	Norfolk	1050-1099	TL 78151 94772	Liber Eliensis
Croxton	Croxton	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 24401 60004	Liber Eliensis
Darmsden	Darmsden	Suffolk	1050-1099	TM 10126 53755	Acta William
Debenham	Debenham	Suffolk	1050-1099	TM 17293 63187	Acta William
Depden	Depden	Suffolk	1050-1099	TL 78340 56731	Acta William
Feltwell	Feltwell	Norfolk	1050-1099	TL 71165 90593	Liber Eliensis
Flockthorpe	Hardingham	Norfolk	1050-1099	TG 04421 03930	Liber Eliensis
Gamlingay	Gamlingay	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 23601 52606	Acta William
Hardwick	Hardwick	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 37555 59139	Liber Eliensis
Hartest	Hartest	Suffolk	1050-1099	TL 83413 52462	Liber Eliensis
Hitcham	Hitcham	Suffolk	1050-1099	TL 98649 50487	Liber Eliensis
Hockering	Hockering	Norfolk	1050-1099	TG 07717 13014	Liber Eliensis
Hoo	Sutton Hoo	Suffolk	1050-1099	TM 28799 48698	Acta William
Impington	Impington	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 43730 63788	Acta William
Letton	Letton	Norfolk	1050-1099	TF 97168 06004	Liber Eliensis
Lolworth	Lolworth	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 36779 64203	Liber Eliensis
Longstanton	Longstanton	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 39801 66514	Acta William
Marham	Marham	Norfolk	1050-1099	TF 70900 10002	Acta William
Mattishall	Mattishall	Norfolk	1050-1099	TG 05341 11075	Acta William
Melbourn	Melbourn	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 38549 44553	Acta William
Meldreth	Meldreth	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 37089 46516	Liber Eliensis
Methwold	Methwold	Norfolk	1050-1099	TL 73124 94035	Acta William
Milton	Milton	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 47674 62791	Acta William
Mundford	Mundford	Norfolk	1050-1099	TL 80329 93360	Liber Eliensis
Northwold	Northwold	Norfolk	1050-1099	TL 75151 97169	Acta William
Over	Over	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 37523 70346	Liber Eliensis
Oxwick	Oxwick	Norfolk	1050-1099	TF 91270 24926	Acta William
Quy	Quy	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 52099 60655	Liber Eliensis
Rettendon	Rettendon	Essex	1050-1099	TQ 76472 98146	Liber Eliensis
Reydon	Reydon	Suffolk	1050-1099	TM 50075 77397	Liber Eliensis
Rising	Castle Rising	Norfolk	1050-1099	TF 66596 24739	Acta William
Shelford	Great Shelford	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 46218 52374	Acta William
Shipdham	Shipdham	Norfolk	1050-1099	TF 95964 07292	Liber Eliensis
South Burgh	Cranworth	Norfolk	1050-1099	TF 98307 04658	Liber Eliensis
South Farnbridge	South Farnbridge	Essex	1050-1099	TQ 85476 95852	Acta William
Stapleford	Stapleford	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 47498 51488	Acta William
Swaffham	Swaffham Prior	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 57106 63805	Liber Eliensis
Terling	Terling	Essex	1050-1099	TL 76868 15038	Acta William
Thuxton	Thuxton	Norfolk	1050-1099	TM 04329 78897	Liber Eliensis
Toft	Toft	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 35928 56122	Acta William
Trumpington	Trumpington	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 44315 54957	Liber Eliensis
Tuddenham	Tuddenham	Suffolk	1050-1099	TL 73673 71518	Liber Eliensis
Westfield	Westfield	Norfolk	1050-1099	TG 00885 09252	Acta William
Weston Colville	Weston Colville	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 61690 53155	Liber Eliensis
Westwick	Westwick	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 42137 65278	Acta William
Wetheringsett	Wetheringsett	Suffolk	1050-1099	TM 12782 66745	Liber Eliensis
Whaddon	Whaddon	Cambridgeshire	1050-1099	TL 35514 46450	Acta William
Yaxham	Yaxham	Norfolk	1050-1099	TG 00670 10513	Acta William
Bawdsey	Bawdsey	Suffolk	1100-1149	TM 34945 40037	Acta William
Cottenham	Cottenham	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 45001 67499	Acta William

Coveney	Coveney	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 49706 82499	Liber Eliensis
Estona	Aston Somerville	Gloucestershire	1100-1149	SP 04521 38269	Liber Eliensis
Gransden	Great Gransden	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 27056 55598	Acta William
Hadham	Much Hadham	Hertfordshire	1100-1149	TL 42800 19297	Liber Eliensis
Kingston	Kingston	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 34793 55357	Liber Eliensis
Mepal	Mepal	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 44108 80774	Acta William
Pampisford	Pampisford	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 49350 49095	Acta William
Snailwell	Snailwell	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 64513 67508	Acta William
Strede	Stretham	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 51305 74756	Liber Eliensis
Terrington	Terrington St Clement	Norfolk	1100-1149	TF 54961 19912	Liber Eliensis
The Rodings	High Roding	Essex	1100-1149	TL 60273 16941	Liber Eliensis
The Rodings	Aythorpe Roding	Essex	1100-1149	TL 58492 15026	Liber Eliensis
The Rodings	White Roding	Essex	1100-1149	TL 56232 13597	Liber Eliensis
The Rodings	Margaret Roding	Essex	1100-1149	TL 59771 11905	Liber Eliensis
The Rodings	Leaden Roding	Essex	1100-1149	TL 59476 13354	Liber Eliensis
The Rodings	Abbess Roding	Essex	1100-1149	TL 57102 11354	Liber Eliensis
Thriplow	Thriplow	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 43938 46709	Liber Eliensis
Wratting	West Wrating	Cambridgeshire	1100-1149	TL 60620 52341	Liber Eliensis
Ratteleden	Rattlesden	Suffolk	1150-1199	TL 97965 59035	Liber Eliensis
Wilbraham	Great Wilbraham	Cambridgeshire	1150-1199	TL 55042 57729	Liber Eliensis

## Appendix 2 – Church Dedications

Location	County	Dedication	Period of Dedication	Grid Reference	Source
Hyssington	Powys	Etheldreda	700-749	SO 31145 94769	Arnold-Forster
Stow Green	Lincolnshire	Etheldreda	700-749	TF 09027 36358	Liber Eliensis
West Halton	Lincolnshire	Etheldreda	700-749	SE 90591 20926	Arnold-Forster
Bishops Hatfield	Hertfordshire	Etheldreda	950-999	TL 23424 08553	Arnold-Forster
Histon	Cambridgeshire	Etheldreda	950-999	TL 43701 64419	Arnold-Forster
Linton	Cambridgeshire	Etheldreda	950-999	TL 56162 46713	Liber Eliensis
Totteridge	Hertfordshire	Etheldreda	950-999	TQ 24690 94122	Arnold-Forster
Mundham	Norfolk	Ethelred and Peter	1050-1099	TM 32868 97825	Arnold-Forster
Norwich	Norfolk	Ethelred	1050-1099	TG 23841 07759	Arnold-Forster
Thetford	Norfolk	Etheldreda	1050-1099	TL 87056 83122	Arnold-Forster
West Quantoxhead	Somerset	Audrie	1100-1149	ST 11185 41887	Arnold-Forster
Horley	Oxfordshire	Etheldreda	1150-1199	SP 41650 43984	Arnold-Forster
Chesfield by Graveley	Hertfordshire	Etheldreda	1200-1249	TL 24539 27947	VCH Hertford
Canonsleigh Abbey	Devon	Etheldreda, Mary, John	1250-1299	ST 06718 17399	Atkinson
Ely Place	London	Etheldreda	1250-1299	TQ 31308 81688	Liber Eliensis
Guilsborough	Northamptonshire	Etheldreda	1350-1399	SP 67482 72295	Arnold-Forster
Reach	Cambridgeshire	Etheldreda	1350-1399	TL 57050 66249	VCH Camb & Ely

### Appendix 3 – Material Culture

Type	Period	Location	Grid Reference	Source
Rood Screen	1350-1399	Stanton Harcourt Church, Oxfordshire, OX29 5RJ	SP 41528 05710	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Plymtree Church, Devon, EX15 2JU	ST 05225 02864	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Wolborough Church, Devon, TQ12 1EH	SX 85416 70317	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Barnham Broom Church, Norfolk, NR9 4DB	TG 08135 07772	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Beeston-next-Mileham Church, Norfolk, PE32 2LY	TF 89132 15147	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Foulden Church, Norfolk, IP26 5AA	TL 76565 99065	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Gateley Church, Norfolk, NR20 5EH	TF 96137 24511	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Litcham Church, Norfolk, PE32 2NS	TF 88721 17555	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	St John the Sepulchre Church, Ber St, Norwich	TG 23460 07730	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Oxborough Church, Norfolk, PE33 9BL	TF 74478 01503	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Ranworth Church, Norfolk, NR13 6HT	TG 35776 14597	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	North Tuddenham Church, NR20 3NJ	TG 05337 12935	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Upton Church, Norfolk, NR13 6AN	TG 39048 11754	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Sudbury Church, Suffolk, CO10 2EA	TL 87356 41326	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Westhall Church, Suffolk, IP19 8NU	TM 42294 80375	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1450-1499	Woolpit Church, Suffolk, IP30 9QP	TL 97491 62555	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1500-1549	Kenn Church, Devon, EX6 8AD	SX 94536 87847	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1500-1549	North Burlingham Church, Norfolk, NR13 4TA	TG 36709 10039	Blanton 2007
Rood Screen	1500-1549	Horsham St Faith Church, Norfolk, NR10 3JJ	TG 21612 15061	Blanton 2007
Stained Glass Window	1200-1249	White Notley Church, Essex, CM8 1RY	TL 78542 18294	VCH Essex vol. 2, pp. 252-255
Stained Glass Window	1300-1399	Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford	SP 51420 05951	Jane Hayward Database of Medieval Art
Stained Glass Window	1300-1399	Norbury Church, Derbyshire, DE6 2EQ	SK 12802 42236	Blanton 2007



Stained Glass Window	1300-1399	Lincoln Cathedral	SK 97693 71780	Blanton 2007
Stained Glass Window	1300-1399	Lincoln Cathedral	SK 97693 71780	Blanton 2007
Stained Glass Window	1400-1449	All Souls College Chapel, Oxford	SP 51661 06273	Jane Hayward Database of Medieval Art
Stained Glass Window	1400-1449	York Minster	SE 60299 52119	www.vidimus.org
Stained Glass Window	1400-1449	Norton Church, Suffolk, IP31 3NB	TL 96132 65806	Salmon 1981
Stained Glass Window	1400-1499	Terrington St Clement Church, Norfolk, PE34 4LZ	TF 55100 20484	Norfolk Archaeology, vol.4 (1855), p. 326
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	North Cadbury Church, Somerset. BA22 7DR	ST 63625 27036	Medieval Stained Glass Photographic Archive
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Field Dalling Church, Norfolk, NR25 7LG	TG 00635 39121	Medieval Stained Glass Photographic Archive
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Langport Church, Somerset, TA10 9PU	ST 42123 26735	Medieval Stained Glass Photographic Archive
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Newark Church, Nottinghamshire, NG24 1JS	SK 79978 53893	Medieval Stained Glass Photographic Archive
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Salle Church, Norfolk, NR10 4SE	TG 10981 24837	Medieval Stained Glass Photographic Archive
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Stamford Church, Lincolnshire, PE9 2AG	TF 02863 07191	Blanton 2007
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Bale Church, Norfolk, NR21 0QZ	TG 01120 36788	Blanton 2007
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Kelling Church, Norfolk, NR25 7EW	TG 08947 41769	Blanton 2007
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Sandringham Church, Norfolk, PE35 6EH	TF 68990 28592	www.bridgemanimages.com
Stained Glass Window	1450-1499	Long Melford Church, Suffolk, CO10 9DT	TL 86497 46529	www.bridgemanimages.com
Stained Glass Window	1500-1599	Ely Cathedral	TL 54130 80176	
Stained Glass Window	Unknown	Fincham Church, Norfolk, PE33 9EL	TF 68523 06351	Blomefield, vol. VII (1807) p. 356.
Stained Glass Window	Unknown	Outwell Church, Norfolk, PE14 8RQ	TF 51340 03632	Blanton 2007
Wall Painting	1200-1249	Norwich Cathedral, Norfolk, NR1 4DH	TG 23504 08796	Blanton 2007
Wall Painting	1250-1299	Willingham Church, Cambridgeshire, CB24 5HS	TL 40614 70502	www.paintedchurch.org
Wall Painting	1250-1299	East Ham Church, London, E6 3PG	TQ 42856 82433	Blanton 2007
Wall Painting	1300-1349	Gorleston Church, Norfolk, NR31 6LS	TG 52421 04472	Blanton 2007
Wall Painting	1400-1449	Hessett Church, Suffolk, IP30 9AX	TL 93628 61847	Blanton 2007
Wall Painting	1450-1499	Eton College Chapel, Windsor, Berks	SU 96678 77934	(1) James & Tristram 1928

				(2) Howe, McBurney & Park 2013
Wall Painting	1450-1499	The Hospital of St Wulfstan, Worcester	SO 85256 54407	Blanton 2007
Wall Painting	1450-1499	Lanivet Church, Cornwall, PL30 5NA	SX 03922 64250	Blanton 2007
Wooden Carving	1400-1450	Blythburgh Church, Suffolk, IP19 9LP	TM 44999 75177	Salmon 1981

#### Appendix 4 – Calendars and Litanies

Type	Location	Grid Referene	Period	Source
Calendar	Northumbria or Tegernsee	NZ 33783 65406	700-749	Various
Calendar	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	950-999	Rushforth
Calendar	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	950-999	Rushforth
Calendar	Wilton Abbey	SU 10172 31154	950-999	Rushforth
Calendar	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1000-1049	Rushforth
Calendar	Glastonbury Abbey	ST 49921 38854	1000-1049	Rushforth
Calendar	Leominster	SO 49791 59194	1000-1049	Rushforth
Calendar	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1000-1049	Rushforth
Calendar	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1000-1049	Rushforth
Calendar	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1000-1049	Rushforth
Calendar	Bury St Edmunds	TL 85552 64153	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Crowland Abbey	TF 24015 10277	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Evesham	SP 03929 43640	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Salisbury	SU 14285 29663	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Sherborne Priory	ST 63738 16449	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Wells	ST 54957 45903	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Worcester	SO 84971 54583	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Worcester	SO 84971 54583	1050-1099	Rushforth
Calendar	Crowland Abbey		1100-1149	Toy
Calendar	Lund, Sweden		1100-1149	Toy
Calendar	Chester Abbey	TQ 04161 67369	1150-1199	Wormald
Calendar	Crowland Abbey	TF 24015 10277	1150-1199	Wormald
Calendar	Durham Cathedral Priory	NZ 27414 42024	1150-1199	Wormald
Calendar	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1150-1199	Wormald
Calendar	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1150-1199	Wormald
Calendar	England		1150-1199	Toy
Calendar	England		1150-1199	Toy
Calendar	England		1150-1199	Toy
Calendar	Gloucester, St Peter's Abbey	SO 82989 18779	1150-1199	Wormald
Calendar	Nidaros, Trondheim, Norway		1150-1199	Toy
Calendar	Nidaros, Trondheim, Norway		1150-1199	Toy
Calendar	Nidaros, Trondheim, Norway		1150-1199	Toy
Calendar	Skara, Sweden		1150-1199	Toy
Calendar	Sweden		1150-1199	Toy
Calendar	Uppsala, Sweden		1150-1199	Toy

Calendar	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1200-1249	Wormald
Calendar	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1200-1249	Wormald
Calendar	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1200-1249	Wormald
Calendar	England		1200-1249	Toy
Calendar	Ribe, Denmark		1200-1249	Toy
Calendar	St Neot's Priory	TL 18484 60231	1200-1249	Wormald
Calendar	Copenhagen, Denmark		1250-1299	Toy
Calendar	England		1250-1299	Toy
Calendar	Ribe, Denmark		1250-1299	Toy
Calendar	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1250-1299	Wormald
Calendar	Unknown		1250-1299	Toy
Calendar	Unknown		1250-1299	Toy
Calendar	Abbotsbury Abbey	SY 57808 85177	1300-1349	Wormald
Calendar	Chertsey Abbey	TQ 04161 67369	1300-1349	Wormald
Calendar	Deeping Priory	TF 15874 09533	1300-1349	Wormald
Calendar	Finland		1300-1349	Toy
Calendar	Gotland, Sweden		1300-1349	Toy
Calendar	Muchelney Abbey	ST 42920 24962	1300-1349	Wormald
Calendar	Abingdon Abbey	SU 49895 97114	1350-1399	Wormald
Calendar	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	1350-1399	Wormald
Calendar	Dunster Priory	SS 99074 43630	1350-1399	Wormald
Calendar	Evesham Abbey	SP 03929 43640	1350-1399	Wormald
Calendar	Nysted, Lolland, Denmark		1350-1399	Toy
Calendar	Strangnas, Sweden		1350-1399	Toy
Calendar	Vadstena, Sweden		1350-1399	Toy
Calendar	Crowland Abbey	TF 24015 10277	1400-1449	Wormald
Calendar	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1400-1449	Wormald
Calendar	England		1400-1449	Toy
Calendar	Maribo, Denmark		1400-1449	Toy
Calendar	Notley Abbey	SP 71543 09197	1400-1449	Pantini
Calendar	St Neot's Priory	TL 18484 60231	1400-1449	Wormald
Calendar	Lund, Sweden		1450-1499	Toy
Calendar	Westminster Abbey	TQ 30032 79419	1450-1499	Wormald
Calendar	Abingdon Abbey	SU 49895 97114	1500-1549	Wormald
Calendar	Malmesbury Abbey	ST 93436 87352	1500-1549	Wormald
Litany	Ramsey Abbey	TL 29269 85164	950-999	Lapidge
Litany	Wilton Abbey	SU 10172 31154	950-999	Lapidge
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	950-999	Lapidge
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	950-999	Lapidge
Litany	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Winchester, Holy Trinity	SU 48272 29684	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1000-1049	Lapidge
Litany	Bury St Edmunds	TL 85552 64153	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1050-1099	Lapidge

Litany	Crowland Abbey	TF 24015 10277	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Exeter	SX 92061 92517	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Exeter	SX 92061 92517	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Exeter	SX 92061 92517	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Salisbury	SU 14285 29663	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Salisbury	SU 14285 29663	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Sherborne Priory	ST 63738 16449	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Sherborne Priory	ST 63738 16449	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Sherborne Priory	ST 63738 16449	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Winchcombe Abbey	SP 02342 28465	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Worcester	SO 84971 54583	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Worcester	SO 84971 54583	1050-1099	Lapidge
Litany	Bury St Edmunds	TL 85552 64153	1100-1149	Morgan
Litany	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1100-1149	Morgan
Litany	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1100-1149	Morgan
Litany	Winchcombe Abbey	SP 02342 28465	1100-1149	Morgan
Litany	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1150-1199	Morgan
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1150-1199	Morgan
Litany	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Rochester Cathedral Priory	TQ 74271 68410	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Unknown		1200-1249	Toy
Litany	Westminster Abbey	TQ 30032 79419	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Worcester	SO 84971 54583	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Worcester	SO 84971 54583	1200-1249	Morgan
Litany	Amesbury Priory	SU 15244 41395	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Bury St Edmunds	TL 85552 64153	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Carrow Priory	TG 23981 07731	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Durham Cathedral Priory	NZ 27414 42024	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	England		1250-1299	Toy
Litany	Evesham Abbey	SP 03929 43640	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Ribe, Denmark		1250-1299	Toy
Litany	Roskilde, Denmark		1250-1299	Toy
Litany	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Wilton Abbey	SU 10172 31154	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Winchester, Holy Trinity	SU 48272 29684	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Worcester	SO 84971 54583	1250-1299	Morgan
Litany	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Chertsey Abbey	TQ 04161 67369	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Evesham Abbey	SP 03929 43640	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Gloucester, St Peter's Abbey	SO 82989 18779	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Kirkstead Abbey	TF 18803 62016	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Malmesbury Abbey	ST 93436 87352	1300-1349	Morgan

Litany	Muchelney Abbey	ST 42920 24962	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Thetford Priory	TL 86874 83151	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Wilton Abbey	SU 10172 31154	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Winchester, Holy Trinity	SU 48272 29684	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Winchester, Holy Trinity	SU 48272 29684	1300-1349	Morgan
Litany	Canterbury, St Augustines	TR 15148 57809	1350-1399	Morgan
Litany	Evesham Abbey	SP 03929 43640	1350-1399	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1350-1399	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1350-1399	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1350-1399	Morgan
Litany	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1350-1399	Morgan
Litany	Winchester, Holy Trinity	SU 48272 29684	1350-1399	Morgan
Litany	Worcester	SO 84971 54583	1350-1399	Morgan
Litany	Abbotsbury Abbey	SY 57808 85177	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Abbotsbury Abbey	SY 57808 85177	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Abingdon Abbey	SU 49895 97114	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Bromholm Priory	TG 34723 33386	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Bury St Edmunds	TL 85552 64153	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Bury St Edmunds	TL 85552 64153	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Peterborough Abbey	TL 19263 98704	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Winchester, New Minster	SU 48145 29207	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	York Abbey	SE 60299 52119	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	York Abbey	SE 60299 52119	1400-1449	Morgan
Litany	Canterbury, Christ Ch.	TR 15498 57911	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	Dunfermline Abbey	NT 09117 87254	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	Durham Cathedral Priory	NZ 27414 42024	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	Ely Cathedral Priory	TL 54130 80176	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	Glastonbury Abbey	ST 49921 38854	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	Gloucester, St Peter's Abbey	SO 82989 18779	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	Norwich Cathedral Priory	TG 23504 08796	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	Westminster Abbey	TQ 30032 79419	1450-1499	Morgan
Litany	Abingdon Abbey	SU 49895 97114	1500-1549	Morgan
Litany	Ickleton Nunnery	TL 49493 43899	1500-1549	Morgan
Litany	Malmesbury Abbey	ST 93436 87352	1500-1549	Morgan
Litany	St Albans Abbey	TL 14584 06989	1500-1549	Morgan